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THE HAWK OF ZAGUAMON
by ARTHUR O. FRIEL

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I'LL SAY THEY ARE – BUT THAT'S NO WAY TO GET RID OF THEM. AL, YOU OUGHT TO TRY EATING FLEISCHMANN'S YEAST – I'VE HEARD IT'S A SWELL PIMPLE CHASER
LATER
HERE, AL – IT'S ONE OF THE GIRL FRIENDS AS USUAL
HELLO, HELLO – OH MURIEL – YES, SURE – YOU BET I'LL BE THERE –
MY STARS – YOU'D THINK AL WAS THE ONLY BOY IN TOWN THESE DAYS – THE WAY THE GIRLS ALL KEEP CALLING HIM UP! HE'S NEVER HOME ANY MORE!
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Adventure

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Howard V. L. Bloomfield, Editor

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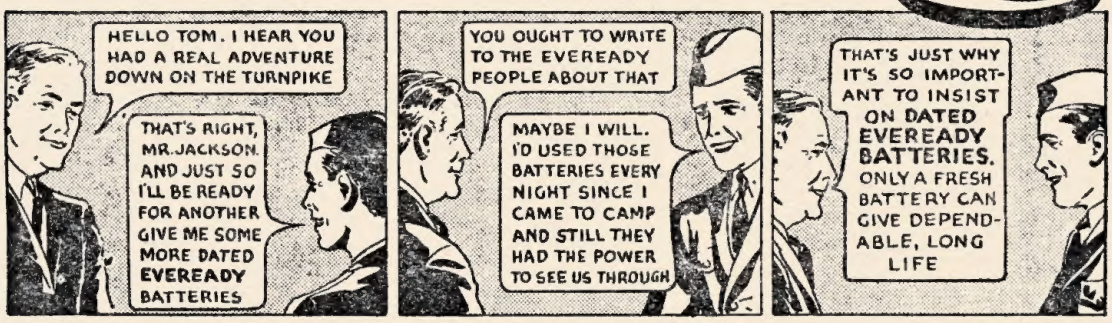
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When Tom Horn Was Called

by William Wells

NOT long ago I read an interview given by a movie actor on the subject of Tom Horn. According to the hero of the screen he once met Horn in a Wyoming saloon, when the desperado was on the way to snuff out one of his numerous victims, and emphasized the fear in which Horn was held by all present.

Bosh!

Along toward the end of Horn's career I was in the saloon at Baggs, with Ed Smizer, marshal of Dixon and a young fellow who went by the name of Arizona. Ed—he stuttered like blazes—was the Stuttering Kid of Dodge in the old days, and was some gunman himself.

After a while Horn and Bob Meldrum, a deputy sheriff of Carbon County, Wyoming, came in.

"Horn," Arizona said, "I've been looking for you for a long time and you damn well know why."

Horn rather cringed.

Arizona spoke again, his hand nowhere near his gun.

"Pull, damn you. I never shot a man yet till he reached for his gun."

Meldrum tried to butt in.

"I'm an officer of the law." And to Smizer, "Ed, I call on you to help."

Smizer only grinned.

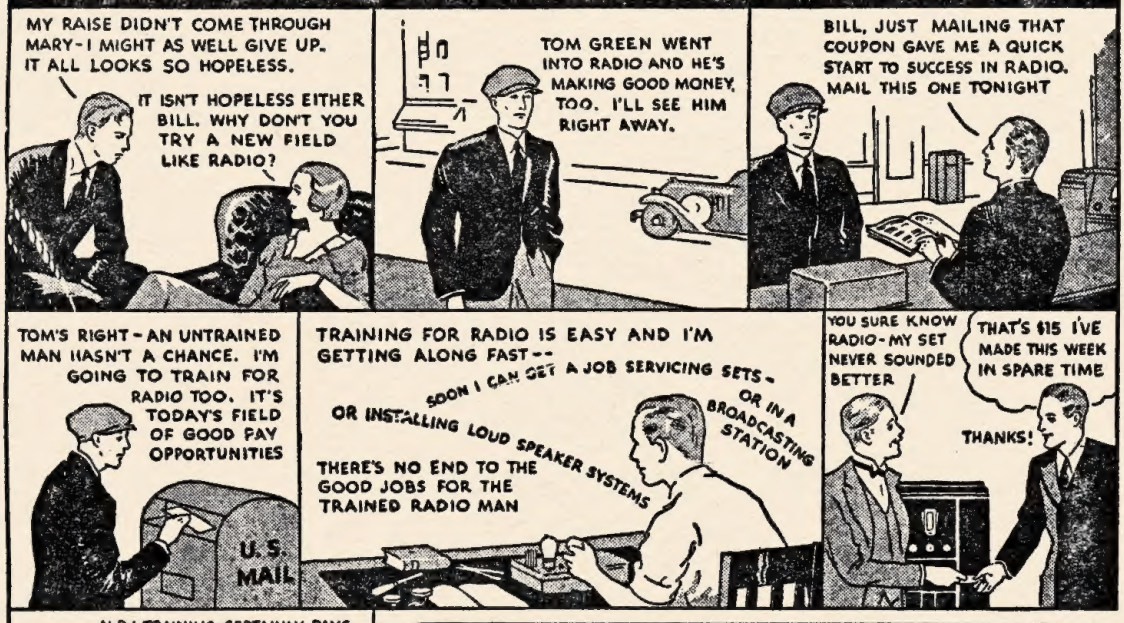
Arizona stood looking at Horn.

"Well," he said firmly. "As long as you won't fight, get the hell out of here. I'm thirsty and want a drink, and to have a skunk around would spoil the taste."

Which Horn and his companions did.

That was Tom Horn. Not long afterward he ambushed and shot down a fourteen year old boy, and was supposedly hanged at Cheyenne. There are plenty of the old-timers who won't believe Horn was ever hung; he knew too much. Some claim to have seen him since.

HE THOUGHT HE WAS LICKED-THEN A TIP GOT BILL A GOOD JOB!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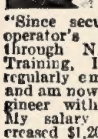

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THE HAWK OF ZAGUAMON

A novelette

OUT of the heat-hazed South rode armed horsemen.

Brown men on brown animals, traversing a brown plain, they slouched sleepily, saying nothing, apparently seeing nothing. But every slouchy body was belted with cartridges; every brown fist rested within reach of a ready rifle; and every semisomnolent eye occasionally swept the flat expanse with gaze keen as that of a hawk.

At their head moved two men far different, yet somewhat alike: a tall, set-mouthed, brown-eyed rider in yellowish khaki; a shorter man with blue-black eyes, black mustache, and clothes of faded blue; both bronzed by tropic sun, yet unmistakably white men. The horsemen behind were as unmistakably *mestizos,* each more or less Spanish, more or less Indian; typical products of that mysterious continent of inexplicable blends of blood, South America.

Down on all of them, and on those vast Venezuelan *llanos* which once underlay a prehistoric sea, torrid sun burned, hot as the glare of an open furnace, yet somewhat moderated by wind sweeping inland from the far-off North Atlantic Ocean. And the men and the horses, taking the hellish heat on their backs with loose nonresistance, took also the heavenly air in their faces and jogged steadily on. So far as they could see, they alone moved on that thinly treed level which, merging on every side into the bluish haze, seemed to have neither beginning nor ending and to support no human life. And the calabash water bottle dangling from every saddle, the tight-rolled hammock slung over every croup, the patient long-distance gait of every mount showed that the cavalcade was journeying toward some goal far beyond.

But suddenly every ambling animal lifted its head, ears erect, eyes alert. And every lethargic rider stiffened, reined in, peered to the left. Off that way stood a dark smudge of trees. And from thereabouts came a dull thudding of gunshots.

Faint, far, muffled by that intervening grove of trees and swept southwestward

"Surrender! Surrender or die!"

by Arthur O. Friel

by the wind, the sound still was unmistakable: a ragged medley of spiteful snaps and deeper, slower bumps, irregular, haphazard, blending in a monotone of deadly combat. Through a long minute the listeners sat motionless, interpreting the thudding beats on the air. Then the two leaders looked at each other. And, without a word, both wheeled their mounts sharply to the left.

Across the brown faces flashed grins. Among the brown riders buzzed animated voices. A long, lean, leathery *sargento* barked one curt order. At once the straggly column closed up into a compact company, and at a rhythmic trot, the group rode toward the shooting.

For a time, however, none drew his gun. Nor at any time did any man spur his horse. No man could, except the leaders; for only those two had spurs, or even boots. All others, clad alike in cheap faded blue, were almost barefoot, wearing topless, heelless Venezuelan sandals. Their hats were native sombreros of plaited palm-strips, their shirts minus buttons, their pants grotesquely wrinkled and pulled askew by sweaty horse-hides. Ordinary *llaneros*, cattle-hands, peons following masters—so they might seem at first sight. But their saddles, bridles, belts and rifles were military. Their swift change from disordered route-march to united movement showed military experience. And their controlled speed, their half-eager, half-wary gaze, their abstinence from hurry or flurry all indicated familiarity with the ways of this tropic waste. Ready for any fight, they were not so callow as to rush headlong into a combat not their own.

THERE and there along their new course stood some small, low clump of brush or *moriche* palm; and toward each such scant cover in turn the band rode, partly masking its approach. Presently the short leader threw a hand aloft. All halted. Half hidden by a clump of cactus, they again estimated the situation. Their own force numbered about thirty. The fighters just ahead, although still

invisible, evidently outnumbered them by a considerable margin. And they still could not see just what was going on.

A quarter-mile away, the low but dense grove of greenery thumped out its deep-toned reports, louder now, yet still oddly muffled by the thick verdure. Around it snapped the sharper cracks of the antagonistic rifles, biting into the dull mass with vicious persistence. Yet nowhere was visible any gunman. Occasionally a low drone or a high crackle in the air near the listeners betrayed passage of a wild bullet; and now and then a spurt of dust from the short-grassed earth showed the end of another futile shot. Otherwise the conflict seemed bodiless, ghostly, fought perhaps by phantoms of men slain long ago on these merciless plains, rising now from unknown graves to fight anew in undying hate; as real but unreal as a visual mirage of roaring waterfalls amid a parched desert; a thing which was but could not be.

"Well, Steele," calmly quizzed the short leader, "what do you make of it?"

The tall rider considered. Tight-lipped, narrow-eyed, he scanned the whole empty scene anew, meanwhile drawing lower his tropic helmet. Originally snow-white, that sun-hat now was stained a queer brownish green—purposely discolored by rubbing with clay and grass to destroy its visibility. While he pondered, his companion went on in easy English:

"You came down here to find some tropical adventure, didn't you? Here's some—if we mix in. How do you size it up?"

Hmmm! A bullet hummed between them. Steele ducked, raised a hand as if to knock aside a wasp, then snorted at himself, turning red. The other, unmoving, chuckled.

"I'd say, Torre," then crisply retorted Steele, "it sounds interesting."

"A reply, but not an answer," plagued Torre. "I asked you—"

"I heard you. Some outfit over there with .44's is surrounded by some gang with .30's. The .44's are outranged and weakening. The .30 gang are probably government troops."

"Just so," grinned Torre. "And the .44's are, therefore, enemies of law and order—as administered hereabouts. And if we take their part we become rebels or worse, and you, the visiting North American *señor*, forfeit your neutral—"

Sssswack! Another bullet—high-powered this time—hissed and crackled very near. Again Steele's head jerked aside. Quickly followed two more vicious shots, even closer. The tall rider now sat rigid, slit-mouthed, slit-eyed. From the *sargento* behind the pair broke a growl:

"*Por Dios*, we are seen!"

Steele grinned, a steel-trap grin.

"*Sí, hombre*," he replied. "And if you're waiting for me to start this—"

His rifle slithered from its hairy cowhide sheath, clicked, froze at full cock. For one second it lay level. Then it kicked. From a small bush two hundred yards away a brownish shape jerked halfway out; flopped flat, clawed about, rolled over, dragged itself back into cover.

"*Hah!*" sounded a gloating rumble from the bunched riders. "*Ojo d'halcón!* Eye of a hawk! Finish him, *señor!*"

The *señor*, spinning the empty shell out with a swift clatter of the breech-bolt, shook his head. Gun again ready but unaimed, he glanced sidewise at Torre.

"It seems that you have forced us into war, much against our will," laughed the short man. "So—"

Wheeling in his saddle, he snapped one terse command in Spanish. Instantly the still group swung into a thin line of speeding action.

Out over the flat land they curved, horses at gallop, rifles out and up. Torre now led, Steele close behind. From various clumps of brush cracked hasty shots at them, but no rider deigned an answering bullet. On they rode, swing-

ing around the hillock toward the front of the fight. This scattered force of besiegers was, they knew, only a guard to hold the beleaguered .44's in their covert. The main force was beyond the mound.

Suddenly they were upon that force. Uncovered, unprotected except by distance, the attackers sat or squatted on open ground, shooting at ease, out of range of the low-powered .44 guns. Into the bare earth before them dropped the futile bumblebee bullets of the short-range rifles; and back sped the high-toned stings of yellow-faced hornets, who grinned at the spent balls which rolled harmless to their feet. The fight was hardly a combat. Rather, it was slow murder.

SO intent were the killers on their cornered prey that they saw nothing of the onsweeping cavalcade until a shrill yell of warning cut across their staccato fire. That yell broke from a clump of *moriche* palms at their rear, where a small squad guarded their horses. Other yells chimed in, rising to a screech. The shooting ceased. Men jumped up, stood agape.

In the strange silence now sounded the pounding hoofs of the blue line speeding from nowhere; then a sudden roar from the blue riders:

"Halcón! Halcón! Viva El Ha'cón!" *

That full-throated shout racketed again and again across the still plain. And from it the brown-clad killers involuntarily recoiled, shrinking back as if from the bellow of a charging dragon. While they still stood irresolute, the galloping blue column cut like a scythe between them and their horses. And from the hillock of their desperate victims rose an exultant clamor of voices welcoming deliverance from death.

Across that hubbub rang a clarion command from Torre. At once the *sargento* and several followers wheeled right and charged toward the horseholders at the palm-clump. All others yanked their mounts to a skidding halt, facing the forested mound.

"Rendan las armas!" barked Torre. "Surrender!"

A shot answered. Midway among the disordered besiegers a burly officer, legs outspread, head low, fired a military pistol with dogged deliberation. Two shots —three—no more. Torre, long revolver darting to aim, had shot back. The officer slowly bowed, pitched on his face, was still. Then out broke other shots.

Rifles up, faces bleak, the blue riders fired without orders. A few venomous reports snapped back. A horse snorted, fell, threw his blue-clad rider, kicked about. But most of the brown-uniformed men dropped flat, throwing away their rifles, holding their empty hands high while they pressed faces into the dirt. Those who stubbornly stood and fired fell under another volley and lay limp.

"Hah!" muttered the blue force. Masters of the field, they surveyed twice their own number prostrate and dumbly imploring mercy. And hungrily they searched for any other antagonists to shoot at. Very soon they found them.

From the hillock of the .44's erupted a small swarm of men rushing at the prone shapes on the ground. As they rushed, they shot. Vindictive bumblebee bullets struck into defenseless hornet backs, heads, waving arms. Harshly Torre rapped another command. Again his thin line fired.

The vengeful bumblebees halted short, glowering with mingled amazement and anger. None of them had been hit, but the crackling bullets had missed them so narrowly that they knew the misses to be intentional. One more volley would wipe them out.

Over the little battlefield rested another brief silence. Then from somewhere—not among the Torre men—rose a voice:

"Viva El Halcón!"

Followed a tense moment, while many minds adjusted themselves. Then, in a

*"Hawk! Hawk! Long live the Hawk!"

rising roar, came the same words. Hornets on the ground, bumblebees from the hill, lifted their heads and voiced the same sentiment. And the blue line of fighters half grinned, half scowled, let their guns sink as if only half satisfied. In a rather bored tone their leader said to his tall comrade:

"Well, this seems to be about all there is, just now. So now let's see what it's all about."

CHAPTER II

"SO TAKE IT!"

WITHIN the shade of the grove lounged three groups of tired men. Over at the *morichal*—the waterhole where grew the *moriche* palms—thirty more horses gratefully wet parched throats or snapped at the captured mounts of the brown-clad men. Between animals, as between humans, no friendliness had yet developed.

At the far end of the forested mound where the bumblebees had made their last stand lay a short, stark row of dead. Among the surviving enemies were a few wounded. Only one, however, was seriously hurt. All were hard men; and all but the one, after bathing and bandaging, now were stoically ready to carry on. The one badly wounded man was the leader of the recently surrounded .44's.

Shot through the chest, he had not many more minutes to live. At first sight, he would seem to be scant loss to anyone. He was old; he was ragged; and his features, seen among an unkempt mass of dingy gray hair and beard, seemed predatory. Sharp nosed, cold eyed, lank bodied, skinny limbed, he somehow suggested a famished wolf. Yet, at second sight, he became a man. A white man. A pure-blooded Spaniard. Burned and browned by many years of facing sun and wind, battered and starved by fighting fiercer foes, pierced now by a final bullet, he still was mentally unconquered and leading his clan.

Back against a tree, he sat fronting his enemies across the way. Grouped behind him, his gang of Spanish-Indians squatted dourly silent. Beside him sat a scrawny young fellow, light skinned, thin cheeked, mop haired, clad in bepatched shirt and pants ending at the knee. In the face of that boy, as yet beardless, was a faint resemblance to the old man; and in his tight gray eyes was the same fixed hostility toward the uniformed men a short distance away.

Those men in brown clustered close behind a short but broad officer, rather young, who stiffly regarded his captors. At the head of the distrustful triangle stood Torre and Steele, backed by loosely ready blue-clad men who watched both lines of disarmed opponents. Now, with a sardonic quirk of his mustached mouth, Torre said:

"Permit me, *señores,* to introduce myself: Ricardo de la Torre, known otherwise as *El Halcón de los Llanos,* the Falcon of the Plains. You may have heard the name. This *señor* with me is the Señor Steele, of North America, who travels with me just now to observe the queer customs of our country—"

A mutter of sarcastic mirth stopped him. A voice derided:

"Observe? *Cra!* He shot the guts out of Frasco Tabas! And—"

"*Silencio!*" commanded Torre. The rumble ceased. For a moment all eyes centered curiously on the fighting Northern "observer", who met the scrutiny with cool composure. Then continued El Halcón:

"Traveling these peaceful *llanos* in our usual peaceful way, we—"

A snicker from somewhere interrupted. Torre scowled; but his dark eyes twinkled a bit as he reproached:

"*Caramba,* am I somehow funny? Is it possible that El Halcón is thought to be not always peaceful? Especially here in this State of Zaguamon, where the benevolent Governor Boves rules with

loving kindness toward all? I can hardly understand—"

Once more he halted, this time blocked by an eruption of noise. Some men laughed raucously. Some snarled. Some growled. Some hissed. Some merely grunted, and some sat silent. But the inarticulate chorus spoke one feeling aroused by his irony: hatred. Hatred for the "benevolent" Governor of the State of Zaguamon.

Nor did this outburst break alone from the tatterdemalion .44's. On that side of the opposing audience arose hard growls and a few hard-edged laughs. The faces of the stoic old man and his boy thinned to a sharper emaciation, and their gray eyes gleamed like cold steel. But, tight-mouthed, they made no sound. The other noises came from the brown-uniformed men behind the stolid lieutenant. And on those men Torre fixed rapid attention.

His stabbing glance traversed the whole force, coming to rest on their expressionless officer. Then, shooting another glance at the gray face across the open, the speaker crisply resumed:

"We waste time. You all know who I am and what I live for: to kill Governor Boves, who killed my father and mother and confiscated the Torre *hacienda*, under the pretense that we Torres plotted the overthrow of President Gomez. And you know that for years I have campaigned all over these *llanos* with that one object in mind—to make Boves pay. And these *hombres* behind me live—and die—for the same purpose: to avenge on Boves things he has done to their own people. Boves, protected by the federal army as well as by his own State troops, has been too hard a nut for us yet to crack. But we still live and drive on. And soon—"

He paused, teeth gleaming wolfishly. From all sides answered a deep hum like that of swarming bees. Again his glance flitted to and fro, gauging faces.

"It seems," he purred, "that even you army men who fight for Boves do not like him. That is unfortunate—for somebody. But now, if you will pardon my back, I will talk a moment to these queer *hombres* who so shamelessly fight you federal men."

Forthwith he strode down the open space to halt before the bewhiskered Spaniard. With him, unbidden, walked Steele and a dozen riflemen. As Torre stopped, the gunmen swung to face the army men, standing at ease, yet ominous, protecting the leaders' backs. Torre and Steele alone fronted the villainous-looking .44 gang.

THE gray old Spaniard against the tree stiffened still more, drawing up his legs in a preliminary effort to rise. The boy at his side caught him, holding him down. Torre, smiling, sank to a squat, meeting his man at a level. And companionably he said:

"I'm a little tired of standing. So I'll rest a moment. Meanwhile I'd like to learn who you are."

Over the hard old face flitted appreciation. The hairy mouth opened, spoke one syllable, clogged thickly. For a second the man visibly fought weakness. Then, coughing, he loosed a red flood hitherto held behind stiff lips.

The boy, clutching him in thin arms, flashed at El Halcón one burning glance. Resentfully he volunteered:

"I'll do the talking! Now, *padre mío—cuidado!* Careful! You rest—just a little moment!"

The gray head shook. The gray old eyes, fixed on Torre, expressed inflexible determination to carry on. But the voice did not come. One more cough, and the old man sagged sidewise toward his skinny supporter.

Torre arose lithely. Steele strode forward. Together they stooped over the dying man. And Steele half-consciously shoved away the emaciated youth to hold the oldster in his own strong arms. The boy fell, rolled aside, leaped to his feet with sudden fury, bony right hand

clenched on a poniard snatched from somewhere in his rags. But the fierce stab halted, sank, went unseen. The pallid old man, looking up into the sympathetic eyes of the stalwart Northerner, smiled a wan smile and surprisingly spoke.

"I thank you, sir," he said. "And I apologize for my weakness."

The words were English, the pronunciation precise, the accent Spanish, yet not thick, the tone low but penetrating. In the same quiet voice, now momentarily clear, he went on:

"Bartolomé Guerra is my name. My boy Carlos—" his gaze slid to the thin youngster "—will tell you more about me. I ask you—and you too, Torre—to take Carlos with you. And these men of mine also. They are good fighters. Will you take them, Torre?"

"Gladly!" acquiesced the short man. "If they fit into my own outfit."

"They will fit."

The gray eyes fixed again on Steele's steady brown ones. Voice again thickening, the dying man asked:

"And will you, sir, guide Carlos himself?"

Steele stared, frowned, objected:

"I? I'm hardly qualified to—"

There he stopped, reading desperate appeal in the fading gaze below. Through a fleeting second man spoke to man without words. Then Steele soberly promised:

"I'll try."

"Thank—you!"

The old head moved, fixing attention now on the youngster. The old voice faltered:

"Carlos—you—you heard?"

"I heard, father."

The response was quick, clear, compact. The two regarded each other intently. The old head weakly nodded. Then, with one final rending cough and a convulsive struggle, Bartolomé Guerra died.

Steele laid him down and arose slowly. Torre, briskly standing, swung to confront the killers of Guerra.

At a touch his men gave way, closed again at his back, facing now toward the somber Guerra crew. To the sphinx-faced army officer El Halcón gave a cold look and a crisp challenge. "Want to talk?"

STIFF-BACKED, stiff-necked, stiff-lipped, the surviving commander of the besiegers gauged the Hawk's gaze and attitude. Then he deliberately arose to stand with arms folded across his chest.

"*Sí.* I will talk," he replied. "I am very pleased to meet you, Señor Halcón. Very pleased."

His voice belied the cordial words. Metallic, mechanical, it was unfeeling as the click of a gun-lock. And in it was an undertone which made Torre regard him oddly; a note which differed from the usual Venezuelan accent.

"As an officer in the force of Governor Boves," continued the chill voice, "I have much heard of you. I have also seen the things you do to captured federal officers: sending them back to Boves stripped naked, burned by the sun, with insults to Boves painted on their skins. I have also already seen what Boves did to them. So I do not wish to have such things done to me."

He grinned, a sour grin without mirth. Steadily he went on:

"My men seem now already to be your men. So there seems to be only one thing for me to do—"

Torre, hitherto suspicious, relaxed with a sarcastic smile. The precise speech, apparently made to save the officer's face, seemed preliminary to complete surrender. Thus the Hawk was caught off guard.

"So take it!"

The grating voice suddenly hissed. The peacefully folded arms flew apart. The right hand, gripping a small flat

pocket gun, darted to aim, hung a second, spat flame.

The shot was half a second too slow. Steele, watching keenly, had leaped like a jaguar. His big fist, driven by long arm and longer frame, smashed into the inscrutable face as the pistol cracked. The assassin fell headlong backward.

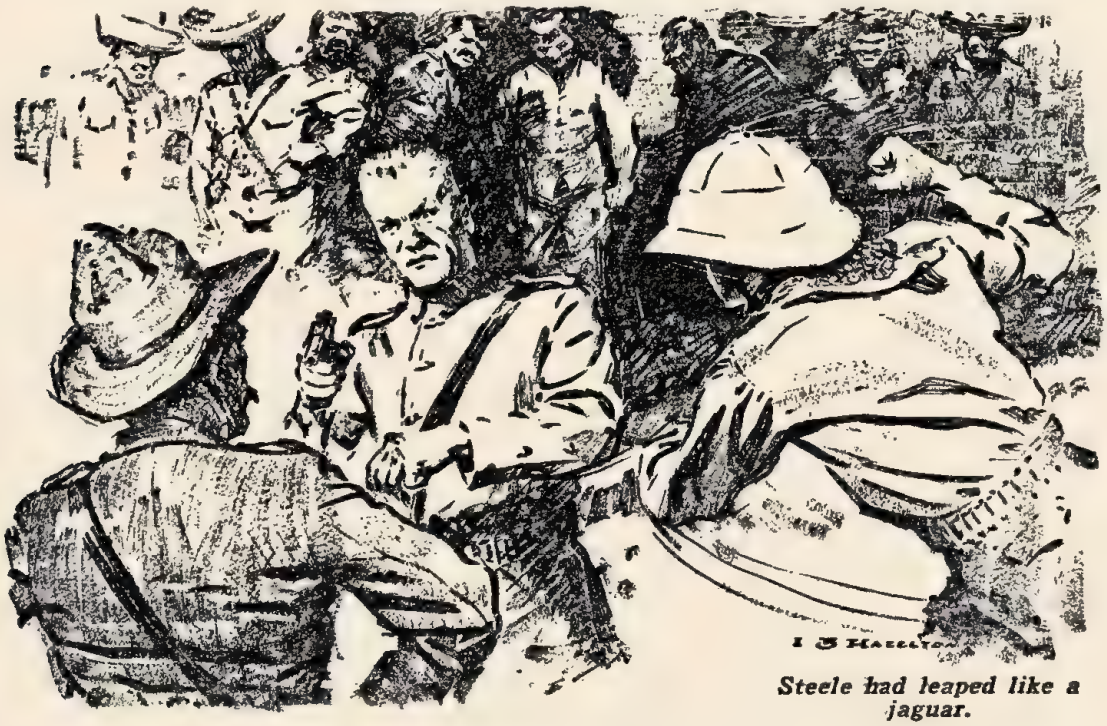
belated joke. Soon, as the hot hornets cooled, came another silence.

Steele and Torre turned to each other. Steele asked:

"Feeling all right?"

"Somewhat humiliated," Torre chuckled gamely. "Is my face red?"

"And how!"



Steele had leaped like a jaguar.

Torre, one cheek crimson, staggered sidewise, dragging out his sidearm. Then, blinking rapidly, he withheld his retaliatory bullet.

The brown-uniformed hornets were at work. After one astounded instant they had swarmed on their fallen officer. From them rose a virulent hum of ferocity. From their prey, hidden under mutinous brown bodies which wrenched and tore, came one half-conscious noise which dwindled and died.

Torre steadied. Steele, straightening grimly, watched the diminishing turmoil. The gray old man who had led the Guerra gang grinned fixedly toward the leaf-curtained sky, as if enjoying some

"Serves me right. But, as I was saying awhile ago, this seems to be about all just now. So let's—"

The cheery voice stopped. The cocky body slumped, dropped, lay still.

Through one startled instant everyone stared. Then Steele's long legs swung across the limp shape in a protective stride; Steele's long jaw jutted farther forward; Steele's long hand rested on his long belt-gun. And beside him, with poniard poised for swift throw, the boy Carlos mutely supported his assumption of command.

"Any questions?" challenged Steele.

No man answered.

CHAPTER III

COMMAND

SUNSET shot its last burning blast across the *llanos* and faded rapidly. Stars sprang out aloft. Soon in the east uprose a big bright moon. Wind increased, striving lustily to sweep heat from the land and spread abroad the coolness of the Northern ocean. In the grove on the low hillock, men and horses settled themselves for the twelve-hour tropic night.

The horses, brought from the *morichal* where night-prowling *tigres* or *leones* would undoubtedly seek prey, accepted their shelter with wise content. The men, awaiting whatever might next develop, slung hammocks among the trees and covertly watched their new boss, the North American. Temporarily in control, Steele now had on hand a rather complex job. Three unfriendly forces must be held in firm truce—or allowed to throttle and stab enemies in the dark. Moreover, he himself now had to prove whether he was a mere hard-fisted hitter or understandingly *simpático*.

Torre, leader of the sweeping blue Hawks, now lay bandaged, semiconscious, in a small tight-walled hut of poles and leaves. Within it, stacked, stood all rifles captured from both Boves and Guerra men. Around it stood a dour guard of Torre's own followers, more than ready to shoot anything approaching with suspicious stealth. Before it burned a steady fire, giving out light and unnecessary heat.

Beyond that fire, as the darkness deepened, Steele strode in from somewhere outside, glanced all around, sank to a squat, rolled a cigarette in *tabarí* bark—the paper-thin tree-product carried by all Venezuelan wilderness smokers. From the hut the boy Carlos emerged leisurely. Striking a match, Steele asked:

"Qué hay?"

Carlos smiled. With that smile his thin, set face became suddenly handsome.

"Everything is very good," he replied. "And you need not speak Spanish to me, Mister Steele. My father taught me the English. If I do not speak it right I can understand it."

Steele's match halted. Carlos laughed softly.

"Torre," the youth went on, "is doing very good. The bullet only slashed his head. But the brain is shocked *poco tiempo*—I mean, a little time. A little *concusión*, you know—"

"Concussion. Yes, I know."

Carlos again laughed; swung forward, sat companionably beside the Northerner. His quiet voice went on:

"He will come out of it in two days or three. I have seen such things. Now I want a smoke, if you have another—"

Automatically Steele passed over his unlighted cigarette. The boy seized it, snatched a burning stick from the fire, puffed eagerly, drew a long breath deep down. After two more hungry inhalations he glanced at Steele's empty hands.

"Pardon!" he apologized. "Here! Take it!"

Steele shook his head and drew forth his tobacco pouch and roll of brown bark.

"I have plenty," he assured.

"Oh, I am glad. I thought—"

Carlos paused. Steele chuckled.

"Thought I had no more? Any time I give my last smoke to anybody else, son, I'll have my head examined. Not so very long ago I'd do things like that. But not nowadays."

"No? And why not?"

"Why should I?"

Carlos shrugged; took another deep drag of smoke; replied:

"You have it right. Why should you? But we, *señor*, we starved rats of the *llanos* often share one *cigarrillo* among ten men. It is our custom."

He puffed again nervously, looking

away in evident chagrin. Steele eyed him sidelong; then swung a hand to the bony shoulders, gripped them briefly, let go.

"Your English is much better than my Spanish," he lied. Lighting his own smoke, he inhaled, exhaled, continued: "And now let's get on. Tell me about yourself, and I'll tell you about myself. Today's dying, tomorrow's coming, and we have to do a little sleeping."

Carlos nodded. Yet for a little time he said nothing. Fixedly regarding the fire, he appeared unresponsive. But Steele, watching, saw that he strove for hard-boiled control of impetuous feelings aroused by that comradely touch. And, studying the slim shape and tense face, the Northerner judged:

"Starved."

THAT word compassed it all. Starved for food, starved for water, starved for tobacco, starved for any real life, existing only by inborn energy, Carlos Guerra was a worthy son of his starved but hardy old father. Outwardly unkempt yet inwardly clean, hard but soft, cold but hot, responsive to friendship but habitually on guard—a decent youngster who, with half a chance, would be somebody.

"Yes," said Carlos. "You have it right, Mr. Steele."

The Northerner's brows lifted. It seemed that Carlos had caught his line of thought. But the gray eyes still regarded the flame, the patrician profile was unreadable. Then came carefully chosen words:

"It is time you knew us better. You now command us all. El Halcón—Torre—may know our name. But you would not.

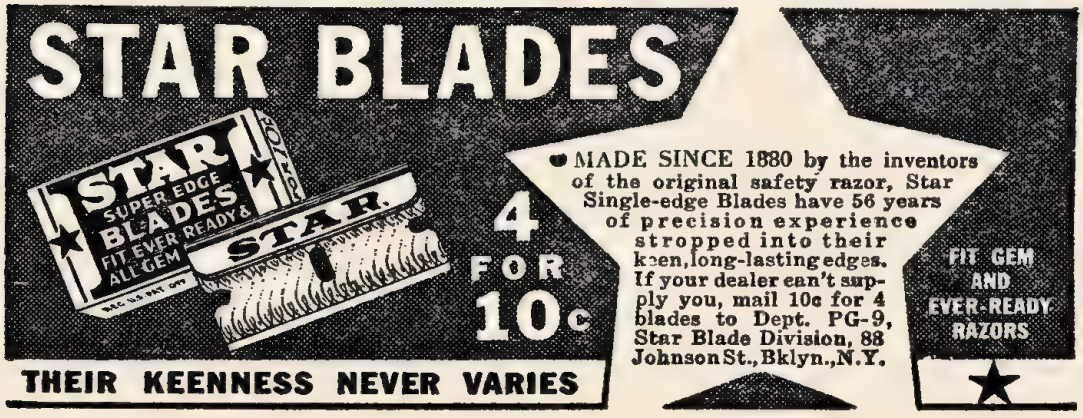
"We Guerras are like the Torres, though not as big a family. Like them, we lost our home, our *hato*—all our cattle, everything—to that foul snake Governor Boves, who seized it all as he seized the Torre *hacienda*. He made President Gomez believe we plotted rebellion, and then turned his own soldiers loose on us. We had to run into these wild bare places or be shot. And so Boves got our herds, and killed them all to sell their hides. The carcasses rotted or fed the *zamuros*—the vultures—and our home became a horse-stable for the Boves soldiers.

"We were not big enough to fight those murderers as the Torres did. The Torres were killed, you know, all but this Ricardo de la Torre, El Halcón, who then was a young man at school in your North America. We ran, and lived. But, like this Don Ricardo, my father has fought Boves ever since then. And, like El Halcón, we have fought alone, never joining any other rebels."

"Why didn't you?"

"Join others? My father thought—"

The youngster hesitated awkwardly; then admitted: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"He thought I was too young to be among such men as most rebels are."

"How old are you?"

"Seventeen. I was thirteen when we became desert rats. And my father—" Carlos hurried on "—was too proud to be sub—*subordinado*—"

"Subordinate?"

"Yes. Subordinate to any other commander. So we have fought our own fights and been our own men—until now."

The boy's tone grew somber.

"Don't worry," Steele comforted. "You're with a good outfit."

"I am not—worrying."

Carlos gulped down something that seemed to have risen in his throat at that sympathetic assurance. Then between them hung a little silence.

The fire crackled softly, the leaves soughed in the wind, the shadows in the grove gave out small sounds of human or equine stirrings. Steele, gazing into the fire, glimpsed things half-spoken or unspoken by Carlos. Stark hardship, merciless guerrilla warfare, bitter hatred and vindictive reprisal—such had been the life of this lad and his implacable father through four long years; yet a life kept spiritually unsullied through all vicissitudes. As Carlos had hinted, the average gang of self-styled rebels in these wilds comprised human beasts of prey, vicious in every word and deed. And from such contamination Bartolomé Guerra had held aloof his boy, his men, until—

There the thinker caught himself. Bartolomé Guerra was dead; El Halcón was helpless. Steele, the alien, had some exp'aining of his own to do. So—

"I see," he said. "Well, you're all welcome to this gang. Torre said so, and he usually means what he says. And when I told your father I'd try to steer you right I certainly meant that. And I still do. But between you and me, son, you're years ahead of me in this sort of job. And I'm not going to try to tell you what you ought to do. You know yourself. And you know your men."

THE young face glowed. The older man went on:

"I'm just a North American business man. And—"

There he paused, struck by a quick change in the youngster's expression, a look of disappointment. Eyeing him, Carlos questioned bluntly:

"Only a *comerciante*—a trader? You ride and act like a soldier!"

"Well," admitted Steele, "I've been an officer—not a high one—in a National Guard regiment up North. And I'm not a trader or commercial traveler. I've been an executive, a—well, an officer of business, you might say. Understand?"

"I think so." The plains-bred youth, who had seen no business men bigger than petty shopkeepers or peddlers, caught happily at the general idea of authority.

"Well, between ourselves, I hate business, and always have," confided Steele. "But a man has to do what must be done. Then some old men died and the business was mine. But there was a lost cousin of mine down here in Venezuela who could inherit considerable money if I found him and told him about it. And, believe it or not, I came down here to find him and present him with his share. Also I wanted to see what this country was like. In fact, looking back, I can see that that was my principal reason for coming. I was desperate for a break from that deadly business atmosphere up North. I'm not built that way."

Carlos nodded, slightly smiling at the last words.

"I found the cousin," Steele continued, "and he had gone bad. Instead of being grateful for getting his share, he tried to murder me to get the whole thing. You asked me awhile ago why I gave nothing to anybody any more. That's why."

Carlos again nodded, with the com-

plete understanding of one well acquainted with the hardening effect of other men's treachery. Steele went on:

"Torre saved my life two or three times while I was trying to do my dumb duty. Among other things, he shot my murderous cousin. So now, with my business wound up, I'm a supernumerary in his outfit."

The shaggy head nodded once more, and a slim-fingered hand lifted the cigarette again to Carlos' lips. Thoughtfully breathing out smoke, the youngster said:

"It must be most wonderful to go to a real school. My father, he was schooled in Trinidad, the English island at the mouth of our Rio Orinoco. But I—I know nothing but what he taught me."

"No? Well, let me tell you, son, you already know more about real life than most college graduates! And right now, instead of my guiding you, I want you to help me. If you see me doing something wrong around here, set me right. And hold your own men under control. Think you can?"

"I know I can!" Again the young face glowed proudly in the firelight. "And I thank you, mister, for—"

"Never mind. Torre's men will start nothing unless provoked. As for those others—"

He frowned dubiously, glancing toward the camp of the leaderless Boves men who had destroyed their own commander.

"They will do nothing, I think," Carlos assured. "They are not bad men, I think. They did the things they were made to do by Boves and Schottky and Kiessel. But now—"

"Who?" interrupted Steele.

"Boves and Schottky and Kiessel," carefully repeated the youngster. "Boves —you know about him. Schottky was the *capitán* of these men, Kiessel the *teniente*. I do not know the English words—"

"Captain and lieutenant. Go on."

"Yes. Schottky was the big one who shot at El Halcón but was shot by him. Kiessel was the one you knocked down after he shot El Halcón. Both of them were *alemán*—German."

"OH, I see!"

Again Steele saw the burly commander blazing away with cold deliberation at Torre; the poker-faced younger man suddenly sneaking his *kamerad* gun from a pocket, yet halting for a fatal half-second to secure exact aim: mechanical men, trained to unfeeling precision in all military matters, lacking intuitive perception of the right thing to do. Through that innate lack all Germany had lost a world war, and these two men lost their lives. Especially young Kiessel, who, like the bygone German Empire, had been destroyed by final fierce revolt of long-suffering men desperately sick of fighting for a greedy octopus. Years ago the octopus had been one Kaiser Wilhelm. Now, here, it was one Governor Boves. And, looking again toward the place where camped the mutineers, Steele lost his frown.

Carlos, watching sidelong, repeated:

"These men of Boves did the things they were made to do. If they did not do such things they would lose everything. They have wives and children. So—you see."

Steele nodded; but, surprised by the dispassionate judgment of recently hated foes, looked a question.

"They are *llaneros* like ourselves," the lad explained coolly. "We *llaneros* understand each the other. We kill each the other if we must, but we know. I do not think any man over there—" his head moved toward the mutineers "—will make trouble tonight. But my men will watch—"

"Your men need rest! So do the others. I'll arrange all that. And you, son, take a good sleep!"

The Northerner arose. For a second his hand rested on the bushy dark hair.

"I understand things better now," he

added. "And thanks, son, for steering me right! Now you turn in!"

He turned away, took three steps, halted. Carlos had leaped up, demanding:

"*Cuantos años tiene usted?*"

The Northerner stared, mechanically answered:

"How old am I? Thirty-two. Why?"

The youngster swiftly figured, smiled, retorted:

"Then you are not old enough to call me 'son'. Do not do it! I do not like it."

"Oh, all right." The tall man grinned. "*Compañero.* Partner. How's that?"

"*Más*—much better!"

The two regarded each other oddly. Then Steele swung away, facing the further arrangements of the night. But, unknown to him, the vital arrangement was already made.

All around these two new commanders of three fighting forces, intent eyes and ears had watched and listened amid the gloom of the grove. To those Latin observers English words meant nothing; but every look, tone, movement might mean everything. Throughout the conference between big Northerner and slender Southerner every tiny change had been absorbed and interpreted. And now, while Carlos' gray eyes smiled into the fire and Steele's brown ones narrowly searched for trouble in the shadows, over the whole hair-triggered camp flowed a feeling of relief.

The hard-hitting outlander had proved himself to be also *simpático.* And on that one point hung the difference between peace through the night or murderous conflict before dawn.

CHAPTER IV

RECRUITS

THROUGH the night the fire burned. Through the night the men of El Halcón stood guard around the hut, paced around the hillock, and did a slow sentry-go between the Boves mutineers and the Guerra rebels. To every man of that small but efficient force was assigned his nightlong job of keeping peace; and, unlike the usual Latin sentinel, none shirked his job to sleep in some obscure shadow.

And, through the night, all but the guardians of the Torre hut found reason for vigilance. Against that shelter no enemy advanced. But in the grove sounded occasional stealthly rustles of creeping things, rather heavy, seeking sneaky escape into the open. Every such movement stopped instantly at the metallic sound of a back-drawn breechbolt; then very softly receded. Outside, the slowly pacing sentries not only cocked their pieces but shot.

There in the open, while the high moon was occasionally swallowed by some broad dark cloud, big cat-beasts with drooling jaws stole up toward the horses. One or two of these suddenly died. Others, narrowly missed by bullets, snarled, then fled. Meanwhile listening ears in the Boves camp registered the fact that nothing could get into or out of this grove undetected. So, at length, all was quiet.

"I think," Steele had told Torre's sergeant, "we should guard especially against any leaks of information to the outside. Is any town or settlement near here?"

"*Cinco leguas,*" nodded the plainsman. "Five leagues north, a *pueblo.*"

"Well, what do you think of my idea?"

"*'Stá bueno,*" came laconic approval

"All right. You'll see to it, eh? And what about food? By tomorrow noon we'll be on short rations, unless—"

He paused.

"Food will come," the veteran declared.

"*Bueno!* I leave that also to you." So, assured that everything was well in hand, Steele sensibly sought rest.

Near the fire hung his hammock, waiting. A few yards away was that of Car-

los, holding a slim, ragged, half-huddled body sound asleep. Inside the hut Torre rested. And, stepping softly in and gazing a moment, Steele emerged with a satisfied nod. As Carlos had said, the wounded leader was doing "very good." Breathing easily, lying loosely, trusting everything to his men, El Halcón slept like a child, giving Nature full freedom to work her own cure.

Beside his own hammock Steele paused, eyeing the uncovered youth across the way. Then, grasping his light blanket, he walked over to the youngster now his foster son. Over the huddled form he spread the light wool cloth, protection against chill night dew. Carefully he tucked it down, then stood a moment looking at the face half hidden under an upthrown arm. Something drew his gaze aside—to meet a scowl of glowering hostility.

A few feet off, a young Guerra man had half risen in his hammock to watch Steele's paternal movements; and now his narrow regard spoke ugly suspicion. Swarthy, stocky, heavy-mouthed, beetle-browed, he was evidently of a type both surly and stubborn. Studying his truculent visage, the Northerner felt a flash of anger. In three strides he confronted the scowler, demanding:

"Qué tiene? What's bothering you?"

"Qué pasa ahí?" came growling retort. "What's going on here?"

Steele's frown deepened. Then, again plumbing the sullen black eyes, he laughed shortly.

"Nothing you need worry over," he snubbed. "Take a sleep for yourself."

And, wheeling away, he swung back to his own hammock, thinking:

"You'd better do the same, Rodney Steele—take a sleep! You're getting touchy. That lad's just a faithful watch-dog—a one-man dog with one idea—and Carlos is lucky to have him around. So forget it!"

Wherewith he sank into the wide-meshed *chinchorro* and presently fell asleep. But, unknown to him, the incident had been observed and taken somewhat more seriously by others. And something was done about it.

While Carlos unconsciously snuggled deeper into the heaven-sent blanket and Steele unconsciously drew up his long legs to counteract the increasing coolness, the sleepless Torre *sargento* walked around, heard this and that, and strode to the hammock of the Guerra watch-dog, now slumbering. By an expert squeeze of one huge hand he both aroused the sleeper and paralyzed all movement. And in Venezuelan vernacular he delivered a quiet speech which, considerably expurgated, meant:

"You so-and-so, learn some manners! Otherwise you will eat your own liver and like it. Get me?"

The listener got him. The dour noncom, mostly Spanish but partly Indian, was fully capable of making good his threat. Released, the churlish fellow lay shuddering. Thereafter the camp was quiescent, if not dormant.

THE moon marched on down the sky. The sun shot up. Steele, awaking, stared at what he saw. Squatting companionably beside a newly blazing fire, Carlos and El Halcón were smoking *cigarrillos* and talking quietly.

Except for a broad bandage around his head, the recently comatose Torre seemed not only unhurt but vigorous. His blue-black eyes were alight, his black mustache combed, his clothing neat, his wiry body erect. Carlos, too, looked better: hair smooth, face clean, slim shape tranquilly at ease, yet moving lithely with each upward lift of the cigarette. And somehow the lad looked less angular, less drawn and pallid than on yesterday; his limbs and cheeks seemed more rounded, his skin faintly aglow. Between the two lay the scant remains of a hearty breakfast.

"Here!" jarred Steele. "What are you up to, Ricardo?"

Torre grinned impishly, blew smoke at him, remarked to Carlos:

"Here comes grandpa, grouchy because we boys woke him up."

The boy laughed, regarding Steele with amusement, yet with half-hidden affection. Said he:

"Grandpas should not to sleep without their blanket."

"No?" snapped Steele. "Neither should children. And I'll see that you have one of your own hereafter and use it. You, Rickey, belong in bed! You've no business to get up today at all!"

"O-o-oh!" mocked Carlos. "What an ugly old crab he is! I do not like him, Don Ricardo. Do you?"

"I don't dare tell you," stage-whispered Torre. "He might hear me. And he's bigger than I am."

They snickered together. Steele, despite himself, grinned; then again objected:

"But seriously—"

"But seriously, you're much too serious," Torre cut him off. "My head is thicker and harder than you thought, old fellow. I had a nasty headache last night and slept it off. Now I'm on the job again. The order of this day is—business as usual."

The crisp words were convincing. Steele, after another straight look, nodded and arose. Last night's concentrated rest, plus innate recuperative powers, had restored the spunky leader to complete control of body and mind.

"And," added Torre, in a different tone, "I'm glad you were around here to handle things last night, Rod."

"Hell, I didn't do anything, Rickey," disclaimed Steele, yanking his loose belt to the right hole. "Your boys held the lid on. Now where can I wash my face?"

He strode away. Ricardo de la Torre laughed, then sobered. One hand patted the boy's nearer knee.

"There," he said in Spanish, "is a man!"

And in Spanish the lad retorted:

"You're telling me?"

Then both turned, stared upward, frowned. Behind them had sounded swift footsteps and an inarticulate growl. There now stood Carlos' human watchdog.

Heavy brows drawn, heavy jaw out, the thick-witted fellow glowered down at the man who had dared touch his master. All around him rose an angry mutter from men awaiting the imminent indecision of their fates by El Halcón. From somewhere emerged the Halcón *sargento*, talon-handed, to grip the malcontent and ominously murmur:

"Come on, you! We're taking a walk!"

"Wait!" countermanded Torre. "Who are you, *hombre?*"

The tough-jawed intruder made no answer. But Carlos Guerra, still frowning, explained:

"The name is Tito Zea. The man is a *porquerizo*, a petty pig-watcher who worked for my father, and now seems to think he must also watch me. I am sick of the sight of him. But he has been faithful."

"I see." The commander nodded. "*Sargento*, let him go. Tito, *vaya!* Go sit down. I'll attend to you later."

Tito, propelled by the sergeant, vanished with some violence into the shadows. Carlos arose, sauntered to his hammock, sat on Steele's blanket. Torre, snapping his *cigarrillo* into the fire, also stood, calling:

"*Sargento!*"

"*Sí, capitán!*" responded the sergeant, reappearing.

Rapid orders rattled. Men all around came to attention. By the time Steele returned from his wash-up the day's business was organized and the organizer ready for action. Seated on a crude camp-chair of stacked firewood, coolly facing the silent crowd, Torre called:

"*Capitán* Steele!"

Astonished by the title, but poker-faced, Steele advanced.

"Your report, please!"

"ABOUT what?" the Northerner almost replied. But, studying the dark eyes, he withheld the question. Evidently Torre wished the strangers to believe the "observer" to be a military man. Wherefore, with official brevity, the temporary officer narrated in Spanish whatever seemed worthy of mention. Torre's attention proved that some of it was news.

"Hmm!" he purred. "Schottky and Kiessel. Germans. And Boves, as we know, now arms his men with new German Mausers instead of the old .44 Winchesters. And as I also know, the loyal Governor Boves is secretly scheming to overthrow *El Dictador,* Juan Vicente Gomez, and thus make himself master of all Venezuela. Hmm! I think I ought to report all this to Gomez."

Steele smiled. Men of Guerra, and some of Boves, grinned. El Halcón, rebel, reporting to the dictator of Venezuela, who had ordered his death long ago—the idea was just another of his satirical jests. Yet, eyeing him, the laughers grew quiet. He looked serious. And he was known to do queer things.

The men of Boves grew especially thoughtful. Presently Torre said:

"It may interest you new men to know that awhile ago I outwitted and captured a Boves force which had trailed us up the Rio Orinoco. Their *capitán,* being drunk at the time, shouted to all listeners that Presidente Gomez was an old thick-head who soon would be kicked out of power by your Governor Boves. *Niños y ebrios dicen verdades;* children and drunks speak truth. Have you men heard of any such plan?"

Ensued a silent pause. Then spoke a sturdy, square-jawed Boves soldier:

"We have not. But it may well be true."

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"*Sí*. Well, now you men could not again be Boves *soldados* even if you would. And since you have killed your own officer you are outlawed by Gomez. Shooting or hanging is the best luck you can hope for if caught by any federal force. *Pues y qué?* So what? Do you wish to join my Hawks and fight both Boves and Gomez?"

Another silence. Then countered the same spokesman:

"What else can we do?"

"So you do not wish to. If you did your answer would be '*Sí!*' Well, then—"

"*Momento!*" broke in the other. "One moment! We surrendered because we hate Boves and have heard of the justice of Torres. We killed Kiessel because we hated him and because he struck like a snake. We acted without thinking. We are not sorry. But now we do not wish to fight against Presidente Gomez. Against Boves some of us will gladly fight; others not. Some of us have relatives who will suffer for what we have already done. We do not all think alike about what we would do next—if we could."

"Well spoken!" approved Steele. And Torre murmured in English:

"So I think. And, Rod, you go eat breakfast. I'm going to take some votes here."

Steele nodded and went, to be served rather crudely but plentifully by Torre's personal cook and striker. While he ate, voices murmured, arose in arguments, died down. Feet moved about in confused movements, soon ending. Wiping his mouth, he returned to the council to find an odd division.

At one side stood all Guerra guerrillas and many ex-Boves soldiers. At the other stood the rest of the Boves mutineers, looking strangely cheerful. Torre, cynically agrin, was writing something in a pocket blankbook. Soon he ripped out the leaf, scanned it, then read aloud:

"Misgovernor Boves:

I have captured the force you sent to kill Bartolomé Guerra. I have shot your hired officers, Schottky and Kiessel. I will gladly do the same to you if you are man enough to come and get it.

"I am encamped on a hillock about five leagues south from San Mateo and seven west from Tonero. I shall wait here three days for you. You and all the armed slaves you can bring.

"I have taken the parole of these men who return to you. If you try to make them fight me again, or injure them or their relatives, you will die very slowly after I capture you. All my men have orders to take you alive.

"I await the pleasure of your arrival within three days.

Ricardo de la Torre."

AS he folded the sheet a grim chorus of laughter arose. And a Boves soldier, summoned by a gesture, readily advanced to receive the mocking missive.

"As you see," pleasantly added Torre, "this clears you men who go home of killing your officer. Nobody will know, unless you are fools enough to tell it. Now *buena suerte!* Good luck! *Sergento!* Horses!"

"*Listo*. Ready. Follow me, you farmers!"

As the freed captives shuffled away Torre's gaze flitted from face to face of those who remained. His glance stopped on one heavy visage among the Guerra men; narrowed, hardened. Abruptly he announced:

"Tito Zea, you also go!"

Astounded, the watchdog of Carlos gaped; then, face darkening, took a rebellious step forward. At once he was seized by two Torre men and held fast.

"You," continued the commander, "are a trouble-maker. I will not have you. Your master Carlos Guerra no longer needs you. You will be given a horse, a knife, some food. Ride west, change your name, watch pigs again for a new master. Or go to the devil. *Vaya!* Take him away, men!"

Before Tito's slow mind found adequate words he was rushed away. As

he went he struggled, and as he disappeared among the greenery he blurted a half-intelligible yell of rage. Followed a dull crack suggesting a heavy-handed slap across the mouth. The yell stopped. Men grinned.

"Any objection, Carlos?" asked Torre.

The slim youngster smiled, yet half frowned, replying:

"I am glad to see the last of him—if it is the last. But I think you have made a mistake."

"I know it," Torre countered cheerily. "A trouble-maker should be shot, not turned loose! But I give every man one chance."

Eyes again chilling, he again surveyed his new recruits, repeating:

"One chance!"

Grins died. Faces sobered. This, all knew, was their last chance to get out or stay in. If they stayed they must follow through. To any malcontent, any spy, any deserter would be given no mercy.

Every man stood fast.

"Shooting or hanging is the best luck you can hope for. . ."

CHAPTER V

THE WAY OF THE HAWK

THROUGH three full days, and then a fourth, the oddly reinforced troop of El Halcón camped in the shady, wind-cooled grove. And nothing happened.

Nothing, at least, which logically should happen. The provocative message of Torre to Boves, daring the despot of a huge State to hurl his full armed power against a hot but small nest of hornets, brought no retaliation.

Day and night, mounted sentries patrolled the outer plain, ever alert. But the only riders whom they intercepted were jovially passed on to the camp, and there were cordially welcomed; for they brought provisions.

From here and there across the seemingly lifeless flats these strange folk came: ragged barefoot men on mules or *burros*, leading other donkeys laden with ground crops, eggs, fowl, whatever provender they could get together. And none of it was for sale. Doffing their dingy palm-strip hats, scraping their feet clumsily, grinning wide, they gave it all to the Halcón gang and, honored by a strong hand-grip and a genial word from El Halcón himself, rode away penniless, but proud as old-time Spanish princes. And each, while he paused there, eagerly answered all questions, swelling with self-importance while he told all he knew.

Meanwhile the food so easily promised by the Torre *sargento* arrived on

its own hoofs. On the first day a detachment of riders led by the sergeant himself rode out after breakfast and returned before lunch-time with a drove of wiry, wild-eyed cattle rustled from some *hato* beyond the immediate horizon. Expert butchery and barbecue furnished tough meat for many meals by strong-jawed men. So, with the unsolicited greens and yams and eggs furnished by the uninvited visitors, food was not only plentiful but well balanced. And every eater throve. Thin cheeks and thin bodies thickened; healthier color, quicker light came to sun-parched skins and weary eyes; and, most important, lingering animosities gave way to comfortable fellowship.

"Do you see what I'm doing, Rod?" Torre asked on the first day.

"No," grunted Steele. "I think you're nuts. Telling Boves where you are, before you're organized to receive him—You're crazy, Rickey. You always were, and that crack on the head finished you."

El Halcón laughed delightedly.

"Thanks, Rod! I keep alive by being crazy. Crazy like a fox, as you say up North. Wait awhile and you'll see."

And, in the next two days, Steele partly saw. He saw Torre himself take long afternoon *siestas* and longer night sleeps, still cannily repairing the lingering brain-shock of the treacherous Kiessel bullet. He saw previous antagonists fraternize, growing toward real unity; yet he also saw that among both Guerra and ex-Boves men drifted Torre men, companionably smoking *cigarrillos*, talking with apparent abandon but shrewdly gathering impressions, and later dropping a word or two into the attentive ear of their *sargento*. He saw various men from both sides combined, mounted, given rifles, taken out for ostensible drill with horse and gun, brought back and, after brief report by their watchers, curtly dismissed by their supreme commander.

"You won't do," Torre told them. "Take a ride and don't come back!"

They went, with horses and food but without guns. They were good horsemen and good shots—yet failed somehow to measure up to the standard of the Hawks. And, with their departure, the remaining band grew tighter together. All now felt that they were picked men, and that membership in this select company was an honor.

All this Steele observed, comprehended, approved. Although Torre might seem crazily weakening his numerical strength in the face of the enemy, he was increasing his actual fighting power by weeding out all misfits and unfits; and now, with the probable Boves attack looming ominous in all minds, was the time to detect all weaknesses. Likewise he was ridding himself of the poorest horses, giving them to the disgruntled but grudgingly appreciative men dismissed—who otherwise must walk many bitter miles over the burning flats. And, whether those men were secretly relieved or angered by their dismissal, none of them would ever forget this parting consideration by El Halcón.

HE saw also, did Steele, with some surprise, then with thoughtful understanding, the arrival of those poor, bashful countryfolk with their voluntary contributions to the raider and his gang. Every one of those queer donors must have reason to remember some bygone kindness by this guerilla leader. And, thinking further along that line, the Northerner also glimpsed something which El Halcón himself presently made more plain.

The fourth night darkened, deepened, became a mass of shadow illuminated only by the wan sheen of a million stars. In the east stood a tall wall of motionless black cloud, solid as a gigantic mountain range, blocking off the climbing moon. Within the grove burned masked fires, cheery, yet sending abroad no telltale

glow. Outside, the patrols ranged in watchful circle, rifles ready to fire the three warning shots signaling enemy approach. Torre, now fully himself, abruptly announced:

"I'm going riding. Come along, Rod. You too, Carlos, if you like."

So the three rode out into the half-hot wind and the half-lit gloom. Each carried only a loaded side-arm—Carlos, the military pistol of the defunct Captain Schottky, given him by Torre. Beyond the sentry line they cantered southward, breathing deep of the vastness, leaving far behind them all sights and sounds of camp. Somehow the thick grove, the rattle of dry leaves in the breeze, the nearness of other men had grown tiresome. Out here were solitude, freedom, peace.

Presently Torre drew rein, dismounted, lay down flat on his back. The others, silent, followed suit. The horses, tied together, grazed contentedly. And for some time all three riders gazed wordless into the myriad bright eyes of the fathomless dark-blue sky; eyes unblurred by city smoke or highway dust or swamp fog, shining clear and clean down into the gray, brown, blue-black human eyes which looked upward. At length El Halcón drew a long breath, softly laughed, murmured:

"*Sí*. The time is here."

"Meaning what?" Steele inquired drowsily.

"Everything has its time," said Torre, still gazing upward. "It's all arranged —up there."

"Humph! Are you a star-gazer?"

"I am," coolly admitted the other. "The stars give every man his position —if he knows enough to read them. Every ship on every ocean has had to find its way by watching the stars. Every army on every unmapped land has had to do the same. Every man everywhere can plot his own course by reading the stars—really reading them."

"Something in that," conceded Steele. "But this astrology stuff—"

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Torre, suddenly hot. "You're thinking of the quack astrologers up North and the suckers who buy their quackings! A man has to do his own reading, I tell you!"

Steele, half grinning, held his tongue; then, studying the intense face which still looked aloft, ceased grinning. Carlos, forgotten, stayed silent, listening. After a time Torre quoted quietly:

" 'There is a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune. Neglected, all the voyage of their lives is bound in shallows and in miseries.' So Shakespeare said, if I remember correctly. Anyway, it's true.

"That tide comes at its own time. You can't force it. But you can prepare for it, and perhaps do much to bring it your way. If I didn't believe that, Rod, I'd have been licked long ago. I've been shot almost to death—shot through the body, several times. I've been stabbed and left for dead. I've starved, thirsted, crawled on my belly, too weak to stand, with no chance of living and with the black *zamuros* swinging low over my emaciated carcass. I've practically died twenty times—but I've pulled through. Why? Because those stars up there told me my time and tide would come—if I had the guts to make myself live until that time and tide arrived."

He gazed a moment longer into the bright-spotted sky, then sat up and contemplated the shadow-shrouded land wherein he had dared and suffered so much.

"And so, through the years, I've fought and waited—and tried to help my own tide along. And somehow or other, without trying, I've created a tide of friendship among the so-called common people around here. You've just seen it work: these clumsy fellows riding in to give me all they had and tell me all they know. And that snake Boves, on the other hand, has been creating a tide of

hate among these same people. They're peaceful people. They'll endure almost anything before they'll openly revolt. But, in their own way, they're fighting for me and against Boves. And now—"

He paused again, grinning tigerishly into the dimness; then concluded:

"Now, at last, Boves is my meat! My tide swings in! I know it!"

With which he sprang up and strode away into the darkness, head high, eyes again blazing up at his down-blazing stars. And Steele, ex-business man, assembling and analyzing known facts and new sidelights, filled in hitherto missing links and smiled at what he now saw.

THE arrogant note to Boves, read aloud to all ears, had not only squared the bearers with their despotic master but been gossiped to *llaneros* met enroute. Those other outgoing riders, dismissed but only momentarily resentful, also had talked as they rode to whatever new fortune they might seek. And this sort of thing had been going on for years. And thus Torre, the short but somehow great man of this wilderness, half mystic, half tiger, wholly man, had made himself a hero to a scattered, slow-minded, but tenaciously faithful multitude. At the same time he had consistently undermined his high-seated enemy by an endless campaign of audacious ridicule, maddening him, driving him to worse tyranny to hold his job, and thereby inflaming still further the slow but deadly heat of volcanic hate among the farmer-folk. And now—

There Steele's thoughts stopped short. Carlos, lying back and silently regarding the great overhead expanse, sat up, alert. The horses, dimly visible, jerked up their heads. From the direction of camp had sounded two sharp shots.

Listening, they awaited the third report which would mean attack. It did not come. Yet those two, deliberately spaced, were evidently a signal. And soon reappeared Torre, loping in from the darksome plain to vault into saddle.

"*Vamonos!*" he prompted. And, mounting, the others rode at his heels. Although the mound was utterly indistinguishable at this distance, the Hawk led with unerring sense of direction and sure speed.

"*Alto!*" barked a sentry at the right front. "*Quién vive?*"

"Halcón. *Qué pasa?* What's up?"

"*No sé, capitán.* The shots were from the north side. Pass!"

They swept on; reached camp, met there the *sargento*, who reported:

"One man, dressed like a *labrador*—a farm laborer—but riding an army horse. He demands talk with *el capitán*. At the fire."

At the masked fire before the commander's hut stood a short, slight, but straight-mouthed and straight-eyed brown man in shapeless clothing and broken *sombrero*, guarded by a rifleman. At sight of El Halcón he saluted and forthwith announced:

"I am Gaspar Grilo, deserter from the army of Gobernador Boves. My brother Alberto is here with you."

Torre glanced at the *sargento*, who responded:

"Alberto Grilo is on horse-guard duty. I will send him in."

Gaspar Grilo, expressionless, continued:

"I am your man now, Capitán Halcón, if you will have me and will give me a shot at Boves. I—"

"Why," cut in Torre, "do you want that shot?"

The deserter's set face thinned. Through his teeth he explained:

"I have just learned that not long ago Boves saw my young sister in our village and ordered her brought to his *palacio*. Instead of obeying, my father helped her to escape. She is safe—but my father was trampled to death on the *llanos* by somebody's horses. What was

done to him before that I do not know. But you can understand how I feel!"

Torre's eyes burned. Unspeaking, he nodded. At once the other went on:

"I bring you a report. The *soldados* you permitted to return have returned and delivered your note. Boves is almost *loco.*"

"Has he hurt any of those men or their families?" rasped Torre.

"No. He raves, curses them and you, but has not ordered any executions or torments. He is afraid. Afraid of you—and more. There is a report that *El Dictador,* Joan Vicente Gomez himself, is suspicious of Boves and may soon summon him to Caracas. You know what that means."

Torre grinned tightly.

"*Sí,*" he responded. "I perhaps know more about it than you. Go on. What does Boves mean to do?"

"*Quién sabe?* Just now he is a madman. But—Ah, Alberto!"

"Gaspar! *Mi hermano!*"

From the grove strode a lanky fellow who seized the deserter in a Spanish embrace—arm around waist, free hand patting a shoulder. For a second the two almost wept. The saturnine *sargento,* watching, murmured:

"Brothers, *cierto.* I did not tell Alberto why he should come here. *Además,* Alberto is a good *hombre.* He belongs."

Torre nodded.

"So does this Gaspar," he returned. And, as the brothers separated, he told the night rider: "You are welcome. Eat and rest. Tomorrow you shall have a rifle."

Gaspar stiffened, saluted, replied:

"Sir, I thank you!"

"And I thank *you.*" Torre smiled. "By the way, why did you disguise yourself in such clothes?"

"Why? *Cra!* Do you not know that any Boves soldier riding alone in uniform on these *llanos* now is shot in the back by somebody unseen?"

Torre made no answer, dismissing the Grilos with a friendly gesture. When the brothers were gone among the trees he eyed the steadily burning campfire as he had recently studied the steady stars. And softly, so softly that only Steele and Carlos heard, he exulted:

"*Sí.* The tide is here. And tomorrow we ride it!"

CHAPTER VI

DISCOVERY

AGAIN men rode.

Out from the grove where, five days ago, thirty swooping horsemen had halted a fight not their own, now trooped a hundred. And where had been an incongruous miscellany of clothes and weapons now was a military uniformity. Gone were the worn blue-jean garments of the Halcónes, the threadbare drab of the Guerras; gone also the loud-voiced but low-powered old .44 guns. Now every man wore army khaki and carried in saddle-scabbard a Mauser rifle.

In some of those second-hand uniforms were bullet holes, washed and crudely patched but still surrounded by faint stains. These, gleaned from dead soldiers, would never again be needed by their first wearers. Others, unpierced, had been exchanged willy-nilly for blues or grays by the captured but liberated Boves mutineers. So now there were more than enough such khakis to clothe the newly expanded troop—now actually a small squadron.

As with uniforms, so with guns; there were more than enough. And the old Winchesters, the extra Mausers, and sundry other supplies at present unneeded lay cached in a place known only to Torre, his *sargento,* and a few other trusty Hawk-men. Among these cached articles, however, were no Mauser cartridges. Although the Boves attackers had possessed a reserve supply of ammunition, which now formed a weighty

burden to every rider, every bullet was going forward to whatever action it might find. And as they rode, El Halcón hummed a little Spanish air.

"Never before, Rod," he volunteered, "have I been so well fixed for a fight. Until very recently I've had only clumsy old .44 rifles and few cartridges. And now—"

He tossed his head backward. Steele nodded. Far-reaching, deadly rifles in the hands of a hundred picked men, plenty of cartridges, unanimous hatred for a common enemy—here Torre had a powerful fighting machine.

Torre wheeled impulsively, swung aside, halted, watching his new force pass in review. Steele, beside him, also watched. The men, heads up, rode past proudly; proud of themselves, their horses and guns, their membership in this chosen company.

Even the long known, long tried veterans of El Halcón himself sat more erect, held their chins higher, than when they had traveled in baggy overalls and slouched at route-step. Torre's own, leading the cavalcade, they gave the followers something to look at. And the followers measured up to their jaunty leaders.

The second division, ex-Boves men, were headed by that square-jawed spokesman who, with officers dead, had faced El Halcón, taken on himself the protection of his fellows. Behind him rode the brothers Grilo, somehow promoted to an honored place in that section. After these traveled all other mutineers, stiffly military as they passed inspection, covertly eyeing their new commander sidewise; sure of themselves and of him, yet seeking approbation.

Third, last, yet aware of their honor as rear guard, rode the Guerristas, led by Carlos. They too rode proudly—but not so stiffly as the Boves men, who knew themselves to be always watched from behind. Of all the little army they had most reason to feel exalted. Recently starved desert rats, making their last desperate stand—now fully armed soldiers guarding the march of El Halcón himself—they knew their worth.

Carlos Guerra, leading his clan, was marvelously changed from the starveling son of starved old Bartolomé. Rest, roast beef, reliance on virile leaders had rapidly transformed him from peaked emaciation to slender shapeliness, somewhat lost among garments rather too big for him. From top to toe he now wore the uniform of the late Kiessel, which, though too loose, was not too long. Holstered at his belt hung Schottky's pistol, and from his saddle was slung a Mauser. As the other Guerra men passed, Torre looked a little oddly after their boyish boss.

"Queer," he commented, "that that boy insisted on having that uniform. We could have fitted him more snugly with some other."

"He gets a kick, probably, out of wearing a real officer's outfit," surmised Steele. "Just a boy. Put yourself in his place."

"True enough. Not yet a man, but trying hard to be. Well, remember it's your job to guard and guide him. I'll be busy with other things hereafter."

As they cantered back to the head of the column Steele gave Carlos a lingering side-glance, meeting a ready but unsmiling gaze from the gray eyes. An odd lad, he thought. Very direct and friendly that first day, strangely reticent since; in fact, almost aloof, staying much of the time with his own men. However, quite able to control his followers without Steele's interference. So thinking, the Northerner literally put the Guerras behind him and again looked ahead.

STEADILY the march progressed, heading northeast. For a little time the three divisions rode as if on parade, close ranked, well aligned, moving at an easy

trot. Then the *sargento,* riding wide aside, watching all, called an order; and, with horses well breathed and men somewhat loosened up, they all settled down to long-distance walk and go-as-you-please posture.

Thus they rode for hours, saying little, enduring the blazing bake of the sun. At length, soon after noon, the squadron took shelter under a straggly but shady line of trees fringing a dry watercourse; dry on top, yet wet enough, a couple of feet underground, to yield water to diggers. And there, through the horse-killing heat of the fiercest hours of day, all waited.

Many, slinging hammocks, slept awhile. Among these was Torre, who, apparently as unconcerned as a business man traveling to conclude a not very important deal, tranquilly slumbered. Not so Steele or Carlos.

A few sentries watched the plain, squatting comfortably in shadow, yet attentive. Steele, somehow restless, walked about, stopping to talk with this or that watcher, then moving on. South of the outmost sentinel he found Carlos sitting alone against a tree, gazing outward.

"What's the matter, partner?" he demanded, dropping down. "Looking for trouble?"

A slight shrug was the only reply.

"You ought to be taking *siesta,*" advised Steele.

"Perhaps. You too."

The cool rebuff irritated the Northerner.

"What ails you?" he challenged. "The first day I knew you, you were a regular fellow. Since then you've been getting more and more distant. What's the trouble, if any?"

Into Carlos' cheeks flowed a red tide of resentment at the mandatory tone. His eyes flashed angrily aside, burned into Steele's—then somehow lost their fire. Switching away, they fixed again on the blank *llanos.* In Spanish he said:

"I do not quite understand all your American words, Señor Steele. But the trouble is not in you but in me. I am in a new *posición.* I am not what I was. I do not know what I shall be. I think much but arrive nowhere. I—I cannot exactly explain—"

"Don't try, son—I mean *compañero,*" said Steele, much more kindly. "I understand. When I was about your age I had similar solemn spells. None of us really knows where he's going, anyway. Events shape themselves, and all that any of us can do is try to ride the tide, as Torre might say. So why worry?"

Carlos smiled a little at the heartening words, but still looked thoughtful. Steele, regarding him sidewise, noted anew that his oval face in repose was decidedly handsome. Then between them hung a meditative silence.

All at once Carlos turned, looking into the thick waterside growth at the south; then arose coolly and, without a word, walked away. After a few steps in the open he faded into the dense greenery, pistol hand swinging loose near his holstered weapon.

Steele half rose, sank back, feeling somehow anxious over this odd departure. Listening, he heard only the dry rustle of leaves in the sleepy breeze. Bartolomé Guerra's boy, veteran of bitter fights, armed now with a powerful sidearm, certainly could take care of himself. And with a hundred men near by—

He laughed at himself. But still he listened. Suddenly he sprang up and strode south.

INTO the rustle of leaves had come a wrong note: an irregular scuffling sound suggesting combat. As Steele swung along the vague noise grew a shade stronger, ending in a dull bump. Something fell. Something heavy, awkward,

which thrashed about and made uncouth noises.

Plunging into the green tangle, following the sounds, Steele abruptly halted, staring.

On the ground, wallowing, gasping, struggled that surly watchdog of Carlos, recently dismissed by El Halcón—Tito Zea. Above him, disheveled, white-faced but hot-eyed, stood Carlos himself, pistol menacing the fallen creature. A few feet away lay an old lever-action rifle. Nearer to Tito lay a bare knife, which even now he was trying to reach and grasp.

"Die, pig!" raged Carlos. "Touch that knife and I shoot again! Die now!"

Tito coughed; swiped again at the knife, missed, ceased trying for it. But his red mouth stubbornly babbled:

"Carlota—you mine! I kill—I kill Steele—I kill Halcón—I kill *you!* No man—have you!"

"I think not!" hotly retorted the other. "Never yet—and never now! While my father lived you never even dared speak to me! Now that you have put your hands on me— Die quickly, or, *por Dios,* I will—"

The threat was unfinished. Tito was dying. Dying toughly, like a thick-hided South American tapir, which kicks about even after its small brain has lost all life. But after a few more convulsive kicks he lay motionless.

Steele's amazed eyes, lifting sooner than the furious gaze of the slayer, stared anew. The loose army-shirt was torn wide open; and, scratched by clawing nails now dead, out swelled firm young breasts never those of a boy.

The gray eyes flashed up, met the wide brown ones. Quick hands yanked the shirt together. Burning red arose to the dark hair, gradually receded. Then, with a slow sigh, Carlota Guerra holstered her pistol and stood mute, head still high but gaze avoiding Steele's astonished regard.

Long moments passed, wherein the Northerner perceived things hitherto ungrasped. The fanatical jealousy of the self-appointed watchdog, the covert vigilance of the other Guerra men, the adoption of an over large uniform to conceal the feminine curves rapidly developed by plentiful food and rest—all were explained now. So, too, was old Bartolomé's real reason for holding aloof from all other rebel gangs. And so, now, was Tito's effort at abduction—insanely foolhardy, yet, because of Carlota's deliberate advance to meet it, almost successful.

"You heard him?" asked Steele, finding his voice.

The practical question broke the embarrassed pause and steadied the half-defiant, half-ashamed Carlota.

"I heard something creeping up—and I suspected," she answered, voice strained.

"I see. But how did he get the jump on you?"

"He hided—hid—behind that tree." She nodded sidewise. "I walked past, almost. I stopped quick, looked—he jumped out, gun in hand, knife in teeth. But he dropped the gun and grabbed me. Then we—" she laughed nervously "—dance around while I try to shoot the pistol. For a too long time I forgot the safety catch on the damn thing!"

The naive complaint brought a short chuckle from the tall man, who replied:

"Personally I prefer a good revolver to all the trick army pistols ever made. A revolver gets the first shot away first—and that ought to be the last. Well, now let's see."

Coolly he surveyed the corpse, glanced left and right, listened. Nobody was coming. The pistol-shot, fired with muzzle jammed into the swineherd's flesh, had been heard only dully by Steele, heard not at all by the tranquil sentries up-wind.

"Well, partner," said he, "it will save talk if we just forget this. We're moving

on soon, and nobody will ever miss this beast. Come!"

HIS matter-of-fact tone and man-to-man words completely restored Carlota to her former poise. And, turning away from the slain pigman, they walked outward. At the edge of the trees she paused, searched, found long thorns, deftly pinned the torn shirt. Meanwhile he frowned thoughtfully at the heat-smitten plain.

"What troubles you?" she probed, catching his look.

"I'm wondering," he admitted, "what I ought to do about you."

"About me? Nothing, *señor!*"

"But—"

"But a woman must not fight, you think? Since when?" she challenged. "Have there not been fighting women before now? Did not the mother of Ricardo de la Torre, a woman of your North America, fight to the death against the soldiers of Boves? Have I not fought for years like a man? Do not be stupid!"

"But then you had to fight. Now—"

"Now I *will* fight until that brutal Boves is dead!" The gray eyes defied him. "So no more talk about that! I am Carlos Guerra, not Carlota! Tell no man otherwise!"

"Hm! Your own men know—"

"*Sí, naturalmente.* But the others—Not even El Halcón must know!"

Pondering that assertion, he rubbed his jaw. The Hawk would not welcome any complications just now. So he nodded.

"All right," he conceded. "Carlos you are. Carlota never happened. So—well, let's go!"

And, wordless, they ambled back to the sleepy camp. As they passed, listless sentinels yawned. Within the ken of those watchers, nothing at all had happened. It was just another hot, dull afternoon.

CHAPTER VII

"TONIGHT WE RIDE!"

NIGHT. Wind. And the moon.

Through that night, against that wind, under that moon advanced once more the pseudo-soldiers of El Halcón. And now their progress was no restrained walk or controlled trot, held down to checkmate sunstroke. With the murderous heat-ball sunk from the sky and vigorous air sweeping the plain, the troop traveled at a long, space-eating lope.

Rousing from *siesta* at about 4 P. M., Torre had commanded casually:

"Take it easy until sunset. Eat well. Fill water-gourds. Inspect all arms. Prepare for a real ride. Tonight we ride!"

And when the sun slid below the earth, leaving a brief red glare on dark clouds in the west, the unquestioning but eagerly expectant riders mounted and moved fast.

Time passed unmeasured. Head up, Torre followed his stars. The moon steadily marched west and down. Eyes tired by thin light, bodies fatigued by monotonous travel, men and horses moved mechanically. Nowhere in their long traverse had they met excitement. And now at the far east came the first faint paleness of dawn.

"*Alto!*" called El Halcón. All halted willingly. Some distance ahead, looming vaguely dark, stood a low mass, seemingly just another bush-grown mound, rather long. But from that indeterminate bulk now rang an unexpected sound: the ringing crow of a cock.

"Rest awhile," added Torre. "Rod, come with me if you like."

At an easy trot the two comrades advanced, bearing occasionally the vigorous crow of the first rooster and of others now responding. Presently they rode among scattered trees, crossed a brief bridge over a narrow watercourse,

and halted amid darkness. The moon had set; the false dawn died; now settled the density preceding true day. And, thickening the obscurity, around them crept mist from the little river at their backs.

For a long moment Torre listened, then walked his tired mount forward. Houses appeared; low, dim, lightless, scattered at first, then drawing closer together. Soon the dwellings narrowed into a short unpaved street which presently opened into a wild *plaza*. And with unerring knowledge El Halcón rode to a small house on a certain side of that square.

Softly he began to whistle. Softly, yet with peculiar power. Over and over he repeated a lilting air which Steele had never heard but which, the Northerner realized, must be some Latin love-song. Soon a door creaked guardedly ajar. Torre's notes changed, becoming quick, imperious. Then into the damp dimness rushed a whitish form which exclaimed:

"Ricardo!"

Ricardo de la Torre stooped low from his saddle. The white shape leaped up, darted white arms around his neck, hung in air while faces met. Torre's horse, ears up, looked back, then settled to rest with the bored air of one who had seen similar things before. Soon the ghostly figure sank back to earth, yet clung to the legs of the rider.

Steele's eyes, boring through the dimness, saw a perfect Spanish woman half concealed by a long nightgown now twisted awry. For a second her glance flashed sidewise as Steele himself, glimpsing only a long shape on a horse —obviously a most trusted comrade of the raider. Then she forgot him. And, like every other decent man, he thereupon turned his eyes and thoughts away.

Fixedly regarding the dimness, the Northerner strove also to concentrate on the dead, dull surroundings. But a man's ears listen, despite himself. And he heard, in the woman's tones:

"*Cuidado! El est' aquí!* Careful. He is here!"

And, answering:

"*Naturalmente.* And what does he know?"

Rapid conversation followed; so rapid that Steele's deliberately deafened ears did not register the words. Watching all around, he made sure that nothing sneaked up to shatter the colloquy. Then came brief silence, wherein the woman again rose in the grasp of the raider. In the first real light of day she sank, turned, ran, vanished into her house.

Softly the door closed. The two men rode quietly back toward their patiently waiting troop.

"Without wishing to be inquisitive—" hinted Steele.

Torre chuckled gaily.

"Is she not lovely?" he caroled.

"Quite," admitted the observer. "But what bearing has that on business?"

"Only that her father, a treacherous little spider of a man, is government telegrapher here; this is the end of a branch line. She now has given me valuable information which I shall check up presently—after we capture the garrison."

"What? A garrison? Here?"

"Here," yawned Torre. "In a *casa fuerte* at the north side—which you will soon see."

With that he spurred his mount into a fast trot. They were out of the town now—and none too soon, if they were to go unseen. Behind them sounded creaks and bumps of opening doors, scattered voices calling good-mornings, as the first early risers met the sunrise.

REINING in before his tired troop, Torre announced:

"Forty federal *soldados* are in a strong house at the north. They are Gomez men, not Boves'. We will take them out of there and eat their

breakfasts. I myself intend to eat a dozen eggs and a beefsteak and drink a quart of coffee. Compose your orders as we ride along, *compañeros!* Now follow me—and remember your uniforms!"

Torre men, ex-Boves men, ex-Guerra men glanced down at themselves, caught the idea, chuckled anew. To the eye they all were federals. So, lifting hands from Mauser butts, they moved easily after their leaders.

At a slow trot they all rode into the *pueblo*. Villagers, male or female, retreated hastily to doorways. Through the *plaza* the column swung with army arrogance; heads up, eyes leering at village women, lips sneering at village men. Several of those men looked hard at El Halcón; brightened, opened their mouths, suddenly shut them, stood mute but glad-faced. Others eyed the insolent troop with evident hostility.

Swaggering on, the riders concentrated in another narrow street, debouched into another *plaza*—rather small—and halted before a heavy-walled house at a corner. There stood two brown-clad sentries who grinned at the apparent reinforcements; then snapped to attention as Torre barked:

"Where's Capitán Rojas?"

"Inside,—uh—*mayor—coronel—*" stuttered a sentry.

"Bring him out here!"

"*Sí—sí—momento*—just a minute!"

The fellow vanished. The other, grinning yet mindful of duty, held his post, rifle slackly at port. Soon erupted a heavy-faced, heavy-bodied fellow in hastily donned, half buttoned federal uniform, who swiftly glimpsed the sweat-stained, weary riders, then fixed his gaze on the cocky leader.

"*Qué infierno!*" rasped Torre. "What the hell are you doing? Holding this town or sleeping off a jag?"

The thick captain winced, then replied sulkily:

"My orders are to avoid conflict until reinforcements arrive. You are—"

There he halted, shocked dumb. Into his face stared a big-bored revolver.

"I," sweetly said the gunman, "am El Halcón. I will gladly blow out your brains if you misbehave. Now use your own judgment."

Rojas reddened. For a second his brown eyes blazed. Then they roved again over the massed riders who far outnumbered his own men. When he again looked up at El Halcón he grinned.

"You win," he said. "And I'm glad of it. This is a dirty job. If you use the telegraph just put me right in your message, will you?"

"With pleasure!"

Rojas, turning to the gaping sentries, said:

"We're captured, men. Odds of more than two to one—no disgrace. And, if you didn't hear, this is El Halcón. Go in and tell the others."

"No," differed Torre. "Bring the others out here—unarmed!"

Rojas shrugged, bawled an order. At once issued men who, lurking in a dark hallway beyond the door, had heard and now surrendered willingly.

"*Bueno!*" approved the raider, swinging down from his horse. "*Capitán*, you have not yet eaten *desayuno?* Then let us breakfast together. And, by the way, which of these men is your telegraph operator?"

"I have none. I have to use the government operator stationed here—a little crab living in the next *plaza*."

"Ah, *sí!*" Torre looked very innocent. "Well, send for him. And now I desire one dozen eggs, fried on both sides; one beefsteak, thick; one quart of coffee, strong!"

CHAPTER VIII

TRAIL'S END

IN a small, bare room Torre, Steele, and Carlos, full-fed, companionably smoked *cigarrillos* with the captured Cap-

tain Rojas. On a small desk clicked and clattered a telegraph set. At the key sat the "little crab" who was official operator—pot-bellied, cunning-eyed.

"Before you send," Torre warned, "consider the fact that I myself am a good amateur telegrapher. It suits me at present to use your hand instead of my own. Mine is a little tired, but not too tired to blow your head off if your sending doesn't sound natural. *Cuidado!*"

The little crab, turning pallid, fervently promised:

"I would not deceive you, Don Ricardo! We all know your fame—we are grateful that you have come here—"

"*Peste!*" Torre cut him off. "Take this, carefully:

> "General Juan Vicente Gomez, Comandante Supremo, Caracas: This town, San Cristóbal, has been captured by El Halcón, Ricardo de la Torre, with an overwhelming force. After valiant defense I have been forced to surrender. His army now marches on Aragua to capture Gobernador Boves. The townspeople, who hate us because they believe we support Boves, now are besieging this *casa fuerte*. Our ammunition is gone. Our faithful telegrapher sends this and stands by. I await your commands.
>
> A. V. Rojas, Capitán."

"Is that all right, *capitán?*" added Torre, glancing at Rojas. The captain grinned, replied:

"The form is incorrect. But let it go."

And, with eager zest, the heroic "faithful telegrapher" let it go.

"There will be no answer to that," predicted Torre. "But this line connects with both Aragua and Caracas. Both Gomez and Boves will hear. Now let's listen. Hands off, operator!"

While the sounder clattered in spasmodic bursts of noise all sat silent. Suddenly Torre straightened, dropping his cigarette.

"Ah!" he gloated. "I knew it! And so—"

Leaping up, he commanded:

"Outside, *muy pronto!*"

Amazed, all marched out into the morning brightness. There El Halcón shouted:

"*Alerta!* Up! Prepare to ride!"

Men dozing on the ground sprang awake—or, dead asleep, were jolted awake by comrades. Townspeople, shoved aside, retreated—but stopped when Torre's voice rang again:

"*Gente del pueblo! Hombres de San Cristóbal!* I ride on business most urgent. I want fresh horses. Forty I shall take from these *soldados* of Gomez. Sixty more I need at once. Can you find them?"

A moment's silence. Then from the villagers broke responses:

"*Sí! Sí, Halcón! Muy pronto!* Have but the goodness to wait—"

Men scattered, running in different directions. Soon they returned, leading or driving wiry animals bred for speed and stamina. Forthwith the Torre troopers mounted. At the last moment Torre himself faced the wisely silent Rojas, saying:

"I happen to know that you are no Boves man, but ordered here from your own State by the War Department in preparation for possible trouble. I consider you to be not only a sensible man but a gentleman. So I leave you all your arms, though I take your horses. My own horses, left here, will be good again tomorrow. But I ask your promise that you or your men will make no moves for the next three days."

"Agreed, with thanks! As I told you before, I don't like this job. If you'll just tell these people to let us alone I'll take it easy."

"Good! Men of San Cristóbal, listen! These Gomez troopers are good fellows. Treat them right—for your own good! They are not to leave here for three days. By that time you all may hear some news. Now *adios!*"

Again the rough riders rode, headlong over the plain. Miles fled behind; leagues

slid away; hours were nothing. Set-mouthed, narrow-lidded, the troop bored on through the blazing blue haze thickening over the brown-burned land of hot loves and hotter hates.

NOON came unnoticed. The sun, at its highest, belched searing rays down on man and beast. Man and beast still sped on, though not quite so fast. Faces were thinning, eyes dulling, despite inflexible will and copious sweat counteracting lethal heat. But no man or horse had yet fallen out.

On—on—on!

Afternoon. Heat more hellish. Legs dragging, bodies slumping more and more. But heads up, minds resolute. Hell or high water, death or damnation, the grim riders followed through.

Then suddenly a horse fell. In the next few seconds several others dropped. Their riders, reining aside at the last instant, fell clear; dragged themselves to a sit, grinned gamely, waved the others on. But the flying squadron halted. It was halted by Steele.

Jaw hardening as the first horse fell, the Northerner grabbed Torre's bridle, yanking back.

"*Qué infierno!*" Torre rasped. "What the hell do you mean?"

"What the hell do *you* mean," retaliated Steele, "by riding us all to death?"

Torre's eyes blazed. Steele's voice, hard with fatigue and resentment, went on:

"Never have I seen such blind faith as these men have been giving you. But there's a limit to everything, and now we're all entitled to know what this is all about!"

"You're right," conceded Torre. "I've been saving it—as a spur when needed. Held it a little too long, perhaps. *Hombres*, hear!"

Men mopping faces, horses drooping with lungs aheave, all lifted heads at his call. Thrown riders, leaving their foundered beasts, hastened forward on foot.

"How many have fallen out?" demanded Torre.

From an unhorsed Guerra rear-guard man came panting answer:

"*Ningun*, not a man except us—thrown out by our horses!"

"*Bueno!* Now hear, *compañeros!* About three leagues more, and this ride ends. And then, *por Dios*, ends the life of either El Halcón or that filthy snake Boves!"

Silence. Breathless silence, while all awaited the next words.

"Gaspar Grilo. You who came to me in the night—your words were true! *El Dictador*, Gomez, suspects Boves of treachery and has ordered him to come immediately to Caracas!"

GASPAR GRILO, deserter from Boves, lifted his head proudly, yet frowned. All other men sagged visibly. If their prey was vanishing toward Caracas—

"And I," Torre rushed on, "I, Ricardo de la Torre, have brought this about! It is a custom of mine to write taunting letters to Gomez—taunting him for our own good! Weeks ago I wrote him about my capture of a Boves force armed with German Mausers. Days ago I wrote to him again, telling of my capture of you Boves men, armed with more Mausers and officered by imported Germans. One of your own comrades, released by me, mailed that letter at Aragua, under Boves' very nose! And now that Gomez knows what Boves is doing—now—"

He paused, grinning wolfishly. From somewhere rose a rebellious voice:

"*Diablo!* What good does that do us? Boves goes—"

"To Caracas? No!" Torre laughed exultantly. "He cannot go! Why? Because this whole long-suffering State is at last rising in revolt! His own capital, Aragua, is up in arms against him! And Boves, with all his villainous bodyguard, is fleeing for his life! They bolted from

Aragua this morning, immediately after I sent a certain little message over a wire. And I, *compañeros,* am the only man who knows where to catch them! But unless we now ride like the devil-on-horseback they will soon be out of our reach. Three more leagues, *hombres!* Only three more leagues!"

Arose a roar, and almost a fight. Men whose mounts could run no farther gazed greedily at horses still able to go; demanded that the riders get down or take them on behind; met hostile retort, lifted guns, halted motion as Torre commanded:

"*Atención!*"

As excitement subsided he continued:

"All men on foot—and all others who must fall out—keep together and follow our track! You have your rifles and plenty of cartridges. And you may have noticed that today we have been riding in empty land, dodging all *pueblos,* all *hatos,* all places where we could be seen. That message I sent this morning told the world that we were advancing from San Cristóbal to Aragua. We have not been heading for Aragua at all. So, while enemies perhaps await us between those two towns, we travel unseen and unknown. Hawks we are, and like hawks we fly and strike! Now follow me!"

He wheeled, spurred forward, led his men on at feverish speed toward the final goal of all.

POUND-pound-pound. Murderous heat; the worst heat of equatorial afternoon. Horses, yanked sidewise at the last moment, fell dead. Men, thrown, struggled up to a stand, or, struggling, fell back and lay limp. High overhead, black dots blemished the radiant blue: black *zamuros,* vultures, somehow summoned from nowhere to feed on the fallen. The foot-marchers, glancing aside, silently welcomed the men still able to march and plodded on. The horsemen bored on into those last three leagues.

At last, floundering up out of another life-saving watery *caño,* the disordered cavalcade again drew rein, bunching up among the waterside trees. Half a mile away, across an almost empty flat, stood a low, sprawling *pueblo* dominated by a squat-towered church. In it, around it, seemed to be no life.

Torre drew from a belt-case a pair of binoculars, peered intently.

"Hah!" he exclaimed. "They are here! Among those trees *soldados* watch! Dismounted men, most weary—they lean against the trees. Now, *compañeros!* Make ready!"

A low, growling hum of voices answered. Rifle bolts clattered quietly.

"Form ranks! Men whose horses may not last through, fall to the rear of your companies! Come through if you can. If not, don't spill others!

"Now remember: Our false uniforms mean nothing here. To those runaways yonder all men are enemies. They will fight or run. Shoot to kill! Except one man—Boves. He is mine! He must be taken alive!

"Final orders! First we must take that church. I myself will take it. Second company! You will swing east, enter the *pueblo* at that end. Third company! You will do likewise at the west end. Smash all resistance—meet me in the *plaza.* Understood?"

A voice called:

"How about the north side?"

"Nobody can escape that way. The north side is the river Chivata, with impassable swamps beyond. And—Listen!"

Down the wind from the apparently lifeless town came a dull *rrroop-rrroop-rrroop,* the noise of a balky motor engine. And, hearing it, Torre again laughed in fierce exultation.

"That," he announced, "is Boves' motorboat! Hidden here for years, kept under cover for use in case of need. But I, *compañeros,* came here not so very long ago and, unseen by anyone, did one

little thing to that engine. And now—*Adelante!*"

He wheeled. Behind him arose a roar, which suddenly died as he wheeled back, face dangerous.

"*Chito!* Shut up!" he forbade. "Not a sound! Are we hawks or squawking parrots?"

Silence. Silence except for faint hoofbeats as good men on exhausted horses took the rear—and the repeated *rrroop-rrroop* of the distant, desperately worked engine.

El Halcón again faced forward; gathered his horse; suddenly started. Headlong he rode straight for the church. Behind, his hawks swooped silently at their prey.

CHAPTER IX

THE HAWK STRIKES

OUT of their dull green covert, out over the barren brown land into which their brown uniforms blended, out into the smiting heat wherein dull-eyed sentries stood torpid under protecting shade, rushed the column of avengers.

Halfway to their goal they divided. One company to the right, one to the left, one straight ahead, they sped.

Several horses dropped. Their riders, diving free, picked up themselves and their scattered rifles and, swearing savagely, charged on foot. Then from the dormant sentinels broke startled shots.

Riders and runners grinned tightly but charged on, following their orders. Obviously El Halcón was, as usual, right. These brown-uniformed watchers, belatedly perceiving other brown uniforms advancing, were shooting on sight. For all they knew, they were killing fellow-soldiers sent from Caracas by their supreme commander. Like cornered rats, they fought without hesitance.

The riders swept on without a shot. The unhorsed runners, with fierce chuckles, stopped, drew deadly beads, fired. The vague brown shapes crouching against trees wilted.

At the crackle of shots the noise of the tortured motorboat engine stopped dead. Townspeople perhaps dived for dark holes of concealment. And then, from south and east and west, the assailants hurtled into the *pueblo.*

Steele, riding at the head of his self-chosen third company, shot at brown shapes which, ambushed behind corners of houses, had fired or were about to fire.

At the eastern side the second company, the ex-Boves mutineers, did likewise. Their aim was, if anything, more deadly, their enmity even more merciless. East, west, the mad spirit was the same: To hell with Boves and all his henchmen!

The plaza opened before them. A three-sided square of low houses, open at the river side, its dominant building was the stubby-towered, thick-walled church. And here developed real action.

Under broad shade trees burned small cook-fires. Around them had been grouped army men, eating, smoking, resting, and horses tethered or lying down. On the low church steps and within the half-open church doors had loitered other soldiers. So sudden and swift had been the surprise attack that now assailed from three directions at once, the men in the open fired wildly, running instinctively toward the solid sanctuary.

Through them slashed the thunderbolt troop of Torre, swinging furiously around a corner of the building, rushing for the steps. The heavy wooden doors, bullet-proof as steel, were swinging shut.

Torre's exhausted horse—other horses behind him—slipped on the steps, stumbled, fell heavily. Torre vaulted free, landed cat-footed, sprang again at the doors, shooting as he went. His *sargento* and other thrown riders struggled free from fallen horseflesh and scrambled after him. The doors closed—almost.

Their complete closure was blocked by Torre's fighting body.

Head inside, right arm inside, he endured crushing pressure while he fired at men just within. They crumpled down. The pressure eased. Then his own men hit the doors, heaving, battering, forcing them inward.

Other Torre warriors, swarming up, hurled the doors crashing wide. Torre, gasping, crawled nimbly in and then lay momentarily quiet, reloading his revolver.

OUTSIDE, the divided, disordered henchmen of Boves backed against the walls, shooting in every direction at the charging cavalry who seemed punitive troopers of Gomez. Those troopers, snarling, shot back; fell off dropping horses, grabbed up their guns, shot anew —or, with rifles temporarily lost, drew poniards or machetes and leaped in with stabbing, slashing steel. Over all the erstwhile quiet *plaza* raged confused combat, rattling shots, screaming horses hit and falling, ferociously swearing men.

Yet in all this mad *melée* the assailants held order. The ex-Boves men took all antagonists to eastward. The Guerra men took all to westward. The veteran Hawks of El Halcón himself took the church. All three divisions fought ahead, sidewise, backward, as the mad swirls of battle swung each man here, there—or down. And soon arose a cry:

"*Gracia! Lástima!* Give quarter!"

Like wildfire that appeal swept across the wall where the last defenders stood defeated. Their guns fell, their empty hands arose high, blankly beseeching mercy. Fierce shots still cracked. Beaten men fell dead. Then a roaring voice commanded:

"*Basta!* Enough! Stop it!"

Up the corpse-littered steps bounded Steele, gun up, to command again:

"Stop it, or else—"

Everything stopped. For a second his eyes swept the hot horde, semiconsciously seeking Carlota Guerra. She was gone. Later he was to learn that the fighting boy-girl, thrown from her wounded horse and kicked by another, now lay senseless but safe among the protective men of old Bartolomé.

Without questions, Steele now turned and dashed to support Torre.

Inside, Torre had revived, reloaded, resumed command of his own men, who had shot down several assailants near the doors.

"Suspend firing!" he shouted. "Shoot only if shot at! Prisoners, surrender! Surrender or die!"

Three or four more shots flashed. A man or two of Torre's fell or staggered; a man or two of Boves slumped down, killed in retaliation. Then, within doors, both sides held fire.

Halfway down the shadowy room, whence poorly made pews had been thrown aside to clear the floor, a sizable group of uniformed men stood bunched with pistols drawn. All were officers; fellow-fugitives with their deposed czar. Quite a few of the refugees caught outside also were officers, of lower rank. Now these brought to bay within doors stood poised to strike, yet estimating chances of saving themselves otherwise.

"Surrender!" repeated Torre, as more of his men rushed in, leveled rifles at the group, then grudgingly obeyed a growl from their *sargento*.

"On what terms?" retorted a hard voice.

"Trial—or death now!" snapped Torre. "You are already captured, outnumbered; my regiment holds this town and power of life or death! We are here to take Sebastian Boves alive or dead! Boves, stand forth!"

Silence, except for the clamor of battle outside. Silence deep and intense among the officers, while desperate minds worked fast. And now the tight group disintegrated, moving to left or right, hands up, dropping pistols to the floor, leaving one man alone.

He turned to run, gasping: "Diablo!"

STOCKY, swarthy, sweaty yet visibly chilled, Sebastian Boves glowered under heavy black brows at his captor and the hot-faced men in uniform whose Mausers menaced his bulky body. Powerful physically, once powerful mentally, a politician who had ruined many a man and woman by increasing indulgence of his power and finally ruined himself—there have been many such, South and North. Now, run down, he evidently debated whether to die fighting or try to retain life by accepting temporary humiliation—perhaps imprisonment in a federal dungeon, yet still life. Across his hesitation cut Torre's voice, coldly controlled:

"Do you yield?"

Silence again. Then, slowly, Boves let his cocked pistol sink and drop to the floor.

"Very good!" clipped Torre. "Now come here to me!"

And, eyes full of hate, Boves came. Behind Torre, men stood breathless. All at once Boves halted, gaze sharpening, face growing ashen.

"Who," he demanded, "are you?"

"I? Only a man of Venezuela," icily responded Torre. "You have never before seen me. Yet you have been hunt-

ing me for years, and I have been hunting you! My name is Ricardo de la Torre!"

For a second Boves stood paralyzed. Then he turned to run, gasping:

"*Diablo!*"

Torre sprang. His heavy hand-gun swung up, down, thudded on the fleeing head. Boves pitched on his face, knocked cold. Leaping astride the senseless body, Torre barked backward:

"*Adelante, hombres!* At 'em! No killing! Take them alive!"

His men rushed. Several Boves officers, turning pallid as they realized the identity of their captor, dived desperately at their dropped pistols. Hard-swung rifles knocked them out. The other captives, backing off, gave up without struggle.

Torre, still straddling the inert shape of his inveterate foe, directed everything with crackling orders. Steele, drawing a long breath of relief, rested a moment against a wall, then hurried out to learn how fared Carlos-Carlota. In the *plaza* ensued much confused yet cohesive movement, drawing to swift completion.

While dead men and horses still strewed earth and steps and dead men lay sprawled within the church, the sinking sun saw merciless yet just court-martial. In the three-sided square formed a four-sided square of sweaty, bloody men enclosing all captives; a very thin square at which the prisoners, realizing too late that this was no "regiment", scowled with useless rage. Regiment or platoon, it held within finger-twitch sudden death for any Boves creature daring to move.

BOVES himself, clay-faced, forced himself to meet the piercing gaze of El Halcón. That gaze no longer flamed. Instead it was coldly dark. Boves shivered visibly.

"What," challenged Torre, "have you to say?"

The ruined despot braced, opened his mouth—then, staring into those icy eyes, flinched, swallowed, said nothing.

"*Nada?*" Torre thrust. "*Bien.* Then I too shall say little.

"Your crimes, Boves, are known to all. Your crime against my family—your effort to have me assassinated when I, a college boy, returned from the United States of the North to seek justice—your hounding of me ever since—all this is known across all these *llanos.* Your crimes against all these men of mine—and their women—are known also to them, if forgotten by you. So—why waste words? You know that now you must pay for what you have done. What, in your opinion, is the proper payment?"

Again Boves swallowed. All around, men stared at Torre. Victim at last in his power, vengeance in his own hands—this judicial control was the last thing expected by all his ferociously vindictive followers. And Boves, desperately reading fierce visages, grew still more ashy.

"For the misery you have caused, Boves, only the priests of the old Spanish Inquisition could work out the right penalty!" Torre's voice grew harsh. "We are not priests, nor governors! But we know a few of the things your officers have done to prisoners. And we have the same tools! Knives, fire, red-hot irons—"

"Stop that!" yelled Boves. "*Por Dios,* I never ordered such things—"

"My tortured men died silent, or lying with their last breaths. And now you—"

"*Basta!* Enough!" Boves again yelled. "Well, then?"

The icy question somehow steadied the broken bully. Stiffening, he met Torre's gaze with the strange dignity of the damned. And with the remnants of bygone authority he asserted:

"Ricardo de la Torre does not do those things you have threatened. An *halcón*—a falcon—does not torture. It kills. I demand an honorable execution!"

Torre stood a moment silent. From all his men rose a rumble of rebellious

dissent. Without turning, El Halcón snapped:

"Atención!"

The bite of his voice stopped the noise. In the new stillness he answered Boves:

"Right and wrong. I do not do those things. The family of Torre never has and never will. But neither do I execute a beast like a man.

"You, Sebastian Boves, shall hang like a trapped wolf-dog of the *llanos*, by the neck! Then you shall be thrown to the crocodiles!"

ANOTHER silence. Silence while all surrounding minds grasped that judgment, considered it, digested it. The physical penalty was no greater than that of any old-time pirate or more modern cattle-thief hanged in public. But as the utter ignominy, the everlasting disgrace sank in, Latin brains comprehended the full significance.

Boves, swarthy face drained of all color, gasped:

"No—no! Shoot!"

"Men are shot! Vermin—"

Torre glanced aside, commanding:

"A rope!"

A rope, of Venezuelan *chiquechique* fiber, coarse and rasping, came speedily. Gripped by several strong hands, Boves squirmed, wrestled, retched, while the rope went around his neck and up over a thick bough of a low but wide *sarrapia* tree. As somebody roughly lashed his wrists behind him he sank to his knees, hoarsely babbling.

Torre himself seized the loose length of rope; eyed the heavy shape which over balanced his own muscular but short weight; snapped one word:

"Sargento!"

The big *sargento*, face aglow, leaped to grasp the rope.

"Ready, *capitán!*" he sang.

Both heaved. Both, digging in heels, walked backward. Boves rose in air.

Midway between earth and bough he dangled, struggling frightfully. Visage blackening, eyes bulging, tongue protruding, he kicked, writhed, jerked arms, shoulders, legs. Soon, however, his contortions weakened. Except for spasmodic shudderings he hung limp.

Torre slowly relaxed, eyed the dead malefactor, then the living ones whose turn was yet to come. Abruptly he ordered:

"Tie the rope, *sargento*, and let him swing! Prisoners, advance in order of rank! Justice is still to be served!"

CHAPTER X

"WHO ACCUSES THIS MAN?"

PALLID, apprehensive, every Boves officer or man still alive and unwounded came before Torre to meet judgment. And with the speed of a Northern judge clearing a crowded dock he handled them as they came.

He was his own judge, jury, and clerk. Swiftly entering each prisoner's name in his notebook, he then asked:

"Who accuses this man?"

Accusers were never lacking. Sometimes they were almost too numerous. From among Torre's own men, the mutineers, or the Guerristas they came, one or a dozen. As they voiced their charges El Halcón searchingly eyed the prisoner, reading his inner reaction; then, presently, jerked his left thumb sidewise. The captive was hustled aside to wait.

Sometimes the action was even swifter. At sound of the name El Halcón glared and motioned the culprit aside without a word. If any such man gave a false name, wrathful voices instantly contradicted and the liar wilted. The evil deeds of each such malefactor were too well known to require a hearing; and

each, knowing himself caught, slunk aside without defense.

On the other hand, the fast-working judge occasionally slowed; and when his gesture came it was with the right thumb instead of the left. On each such occasion the name entered in his book was German; the charge was made by one or two Boves mutineers; and that charge was brutality.

"Against whom?" Torre probed. "Women? Poor citizens?"

"No," came reluctant admission. "Against us *soldados*."

"In just what way?"

Hearing the complaint, eyeing the defendant, Torre soon twitched the right thumb. The German mercenary officer, stiff-backed, walked aside with no outward response. Against all these Teutons the only real accusation was merciless military discipline.

Up overhead, the dangling ex-tyrant Boves swayed slowly or turned in the hot wind. And all around the *plaza* gathered a crowd of townspeople who, gone awhile ago into secret coverts, now as covertly emerged and watched, listened, whispered, but made no disturbing noise. At length the judge pronounced final sentence:

"*Atención!* Prisoners at my left will march to the wall! Those at my right will remain here under guard! You who stand against the wall will be shot. Anyone trying any tricks will be hanged beside this dead dog. Now march!"

A volley crashed. Bodies tumbled. Breechbolts clattered.

Again the rifles spoke. Shapes still braced upright slumped down. Coldly eyeing the sprawled or huddled figures on the ground, the *sargento* growled one more command. Once more the Mausers fired.

At the foot of the church wall nothing moved.

OVER the pueblo rested a long silence. Rifles lowered, the executioners gazed at their work with grim satisfaction. Steele, a bit pale, began rolling a cigarette. Torre, thumbs in belt, stood wordless, gaze traveling slowly along the disordered row of shot malefactors, then lifting to contemplate again the swinging bulk of Boves. Curtly he directed:

"Away with that!"

Cut down, Boves journeyed to the river in the grip of a dozen hard fists. A concerted swing and heave, and he vanished with a sprawling splash.

From the swamp across the stream lunged several crocodiles. A brief flurry of fighting reptiles, a subsidence of confused ripples, the water smoothed out.

Somewhere up in a tree a little bird piped cheerily. Across the disordered rebel assembly, the avidly watching villagers, the whole typical little Venezuelan town swept a long sigh of relief. Completely destroyed, forever disgraced, a monster was gone from their lives and their land.

Torre strode away. His soldiers trooped after him, shuffling, suddenly as tired as he. As they clambered up the steps, out broke a yell:

"*Halcón! Viva El Halcón! Viva—*"

The townsmen, wild-eyed, were rushing to embrace Torre in Spanish fashion —and, unknowingly, crush him. He halted that rush by one uplifted hand.

"No *vivas!*" he forbade. "Meat! Water! *Pronto!*"

Inside the heavy-walled church-fort, Torre gave a silent gesture. His men forthwith cleaned house. Then, resting, they awaited service by the awkward but exalted people of the *pueblo*. It came quickly, almost worshipfully.

Women and children, hitherto hidden, flocked to revive fires, cook, wait on the conquerors. Men, working mightily, cleared away dead or wounded men and horses; put the wounded men into their own homes; jailed the stoical Germans

in the town *carcel;* then zealously patrolled the town.

The sun vanished. The church grew darker, Candles, brought from somewhere, gave wan light while all within ate, drank, with the gobbling noise of starved men. Soon the heavy doors were shut. And, stretched out on pews or huddled on the crudely paved stone floor, the utterly exhausted hawks of the *llanos* plunged headlong into the dark oblivion of sleep.

CHAPTER XI

THE ROAD BACK

ON THE sluggish Rio Chivata a sleek motorboat swam at half speed; swung, curved in a graceful arc, nestled softly against a short pier. No mere scoot-boat was she, but a handsome cabin cruiser, seaworthy, fit to journey not only across the green gulf to English Trinidad but up the long chain of Caribbean Antilles to Cuba, Florida, even to New York.

From her engine-room and pilot-house now emerged Steele and Torre, both grinning happily. And said the Northerner, wiping a smudge off his long nose:

"She ticks like a watch now, Rickey."

Days had passed. Days and nights of unmolested peace. Days and nights in which wounded men died or gathered strength, and men merely exhausted became robust. Days also in which the prediction of El Halcón proved true: the revolt against Boves, which might have grown into a serious rebellion against Gomez, died out with little harm.

On the second day Torre sent forth several trusty scouts, garbed and horsed as ordinary cattlemen, to visit scattered townlets and learn any news; also to start the rumor that Boves had been hanged by El Halcón at some vague place out in the plains. Returning later, these ostensibly unattached wanderers brought word that Aragua was subdued by federal troops, the rest of the State under control. The wrathful anti-Boves rebels, muddled by the disappearance of their quarry into the vast wilderness, had suspended operations for lack of an objective.

Hearing this, the sated Hawk loosed his German prisoners on parole.

"Ride," he directed, "first to Aragua, then all the way to Caracas. Demand an audience with Gomez himself. Make a full report to him of your experiences with Boves; also of my own actions here. Agreed?"

"With pleasure," promised the ranking mercenary officer, eyeing him oddly, but asking no questions.

"I want Gomez to know the whole truth," simply explained the raider. "He is fair-minded—sometimes. Well, then, *adios!*"

But dictators are not always logical. So El Halcón turned to his captured cruiser.

NOW, satisfied with the vessel, he and Steele watched while townsmen filled its water tanks. Thereupon the two strode to the church fort. Within its thick walls El Halcón called a final council of his followers.

"Men, this force is disbanded," he announced. "As you know, I have fought against Gomez only when it was necessary. It is no longer necessary. In fact, it now is more than likely that *El Dictador* will pardon us all and, perhaps, offer us service in his own army. He has done so with some other rebels, to whom he owed less than to us."

He paused a second. Men nodded dourly.

"But we could not accept that. We are men of the open, respecting ourselves, fighting against other men in the open. Over there at Caracas we should be uniformed servants, tamely obeying all orders, directed by political snakes who happen to be of higher army rank

and so send us out in the dark to destroy other real men—and who, *por Dios,* intend to destroy us too, when they can! Ministers of War—Ministers of Death —Ministers of Hell—for their own profit!"

His voice, suddenly forceful despite himself, vibrated with scorn. Then, gritting his teeth, he composedly went on:

"Retain your rifles and ammunition. I cross the gulf to Trinidad, and from there I may go elsewhere—but not until I have again communicated with Gomez himself and received promise of complete amnesty for all of you. I am sure it will come. But until your *sargento* receives word from me, guard yourselves. After that—

"Well, go to your homes, if you have any. If not, there are many girls in Venezuela still waiting for real men. Go hunting!"

And, with a wave of the hand, he strode out. Behind him rumbled quick laughter, relief from solemn attention. Rising, his fighters trooped after him. And, while staring townsfolk watched, all marched to the little wharf. Fighting men—and one fighting woman.

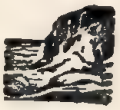
Into the boat swung three ex-commanders: Torre, Steele, Carlota. On the shore swarmed all who stayed behind. Ropes were cast off. And down the slow, narrow, but deep Rio Chivata glided the cruiser, throttled low, yet traveling fast.

Then behind the departing boat smashed a volley of gunfire.

It cracked again, hard, keen, yet, to understanding minds, laden with sentiment. Mausers captured by El Halcón, controlled by the stony-faced *sargento* left in command, were firing into the sky in parting salute. Wasting precious ammunition, but—

Again and again it spoke, receding rapidly into distance. Torre, yanking throttle wide open, was hurling the boat around curves at suicidal speed. At length it died out. And although the departing commander's face remained rigid, down it sneaked twin rivulets which were not perspiration.

Torre could not long remain away. Whether or not he made his own peace with Gomez—whether or not he should live again as Don Ricardo de la Torre, lordly *hacendado,* or as an incorrigible rebel riding the hazy plains and rivers—he would come back to his *llanos,* his men, and probably to his worshipful woman who now waited in a tiny town to hear again his whistled love-song at dawn.



HIS men, only half sensing what they were doing, had told him so with their resounding rifle fire. He himself now knew it. Even while he sped his new boat forward, every instinct within him was reaching backward. And after a few days in Port-of-Spain he would obey the call of his blood.

So Steele smiled as he walked away. As for himself, he had had enough of this torrid land; and his own Northern country, which awhile ago had seemed tamely tiresome, now drew him irresistibly homeward. Moreover, he had a ward, wished on him by a dying man, to guard and guide.

Entering the main cabin, he stopped short. At the table sat a woman he had never seen—at least, so she seemed.

Somewhere in the hamlet Carlota Guerra had found a woman who was fond of good clothes and who somehow had managed to buy or make them; and for them the girl of the *llanos* had made a deal, trading her pistol and perhaps a captured rifle or two. Now she sat levelly eyeing the astonished North American. While he still stared she arose and calmly asked:

"How do you like it?"

Silent, he eyed her from head to foot and again upward. Hair tastefully arranged, face glowing, shoulders smooth, breasts and hips rounded, slender but shapely legs ending in small shoes—this

was the young woman who last week had been a handsome but bony boy in rags. Between shoulders and toes were a dress and stockings, but their color and texture did not register on his amazed mind. His eyes centered again on hers; and in the intent gray gaze he found no coquetry, no leaping invitation to flirtation, such as he had often seen up North. Instead he saw guarded, yet eager, appeal for approval.

"I like it," he answered.

"I am glad."

Carlota sat down. Several yards apart, they looked at each other, looked away, looked again with growing intensity. After awhile Steele demanded plaintively:

"Now what the devil can I do with a girl like you?"

"You could," flashed Carlota, "marry me!"

He blinked, momentarily staggered by her swift directness. Then he answered with equal candor:

"I know I could—now that you say so. And I'd like to. I've never met a real he-woman like you. But you're just a kid who's never seen much. And I'm too old for you anyway."

"Thirty-two?" thrust Carlota. "You told me you had that age. My father had forty years when he married my mother—and she had only sixteen. I have seventeen. You are old?"

Her laughter echoed softly in the cabin. Steele's jaw muscles tightened. Doggedly he continued:

"I remember now what I promised you yesterday: I'll put you into a high-class girls' school up North. There you will learn a good deal. Among other things you will meet young men who—"

"Damn young men!"

Carlota leaped up, furious-eyed.

"I know men!" she stormed. "Men that are men, not schoolboys! And damn, hell, if you not want me—"

There she stopped, fighting for composure. All at once she relaxed with a wan smile.

"All right, mister—I do what you want," she stumbled. "I will try to make me good enough for you."

She sank down. He eyed her. The confused English, the sudden fury and sudden surrender were not calculated but intensely real. And, as suddenly, his own feelings burst bounds. Springing up, he strode toward her.

"You," he said thickly, "are more than good enough for me right now! And right over yonder in Trinidad are English clergymen waiting for us. So—"

The boat throbbed on.

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THE TOUGH MEN OF TALU

by
WESTON
MARTYR

I DO not know the name of the man who told me this story. I never saw him before and I never met him again. He wore a Canadian uniform and that is all I know about him, except one thing, which I am sure of: he was a brave man.

We met at the bottom of a shallow incline-tunnel somewhere near the tip of the Loos salient. I dived down that hole because of a minenwerfer shell the size of a Zeppelin which was in process of making a forced landing on my head. When I hit the bottom of the shaft the minnie exploded at the entrance, and the whole world shuddered at that terrific blow. Then I heard a calm voice say, "Come in; don't knock."

I shook like a jelly, because I was very frightened. I said, "My God! That was a near thing."

"Don't you worry," my host said. "They'll get nearer than that. They've spotted this new shaft we're making, and they mean to knock it out. Hold on a minute while I light the candle. Stand by! There she blows again. *Wup!*"

That one jarred the candle out and jolted the tunnel viciously. It was like being inside a brutally shunted railway wagon. I did not wish to be buried alive, and I was halfway up the shaft when a hand grabbed my ankle.

"Sit *down*, you fool!" That is not the proper way for a private to speak to a captain; but I sat. Or perhaps crouched is the word. Or cowered. When one is filled with the fear of an imminent and horrid death one does not assume drawing room attitudes exactly.

My companion in the hole, which I felt would soon be our mutual grave, remarked, "Sorry, brother. But I know their little tricks around these parts.

They've got a machine-gun trained on the mouth of this shaft, and you can bet your life there's a Jerry with his finger on the trigger, waiting and hoping we'll try to make a bolt for it."

"But if they blow in the entrance we'll be buried," I cried.

"Let's hope they won't." He re-lit his candle, which a trump of doom immediately shocked out again. "K. O.," said he. "That was a beaut. Well, it's no use wasting matches. What we've got to do is to sit here and wait—and not worry. What's the use? You get a grip on yourself, mate. I've been in worse messes than this and got away with it. Yes. Once I was where there wasn't a way out at all. No way. But I got out. I'll tell you. It'll do to pass the time and keep us from thinking things.

"I DON'T suppose you ever was in Talu. The island's about dead now, but when I was there it was booming. That's why I went. They'd found pearl, and Talu was in the middle of the new grounds, and the anchorage was good. So the pearlers just naturally flocked there. All hands. Every blessed schooner from along the whole coast. And most of the fleet from Thursday, too. And Japs as well. We was a mob. Must have been about a hundred schooners and . . .

"*Wallop!* That was a close one. Rattled my back teeth. You're getting warmer, Jerry, old son. Where was I?

"Oh, Talu. I wish I was there now. I'd make a bee-line for Lorgan's and stand myself a long, strong one. And then a lot more. Yes, the shell was good. I made money. But Lorgan got most of it. That was my trouble. I used to hit it up, and then I got nasty. And when I got nasty I got scrapping. That's the way it takes me. Looking back at myself, I don't wonder the boys got tired of me. I must have been a curse and I . . .

"*Wow!* That one was short. Pitch 'em up a bit, Fritz. Pity to waste 'em.

"Hagen was a Fritz, too. One of the fat-necked, square-headed, noisy kind. Always talking big and throwing his weight about. And he had lots of weight. There was over six foot of him, with beef to match, and we called him the Proud Prussian. It didn't take much liquor to make him think he could lick the world. Yes, Hagen was pretty well as big a blight on Talu as me. So the boys got tired of Hagen. He made me tired, too.

"There was plenty of hard cases on Talu besides the Proud Prussian and me. Pearlers tend that way. And when a mob of pearlers gets down on you it's time to move on. But I was too young and cocky to have any sense.

"I had the idea I was the big noise on Talu. The Proud Prussian thought he filled that bill, too. So pretty soon there was trouble between us. Which went on. And got worse.

"The thing came to the boil one afternoon at Lorgan's. Most of the fleet was in, so Lorgan's was jammed full. I was there with a fierce drought on me after a full month's diving. Diving *is* thirsty work. The salt pickles you and . . .

"*Woppo!* That was short again. Minnie's getting hot. What was I saying about pickles?

"Ah! Yes. I was back at Lorgan's, quenching my burning thirst. I wish I . . . Excuse me; I said that before. Anyway there I was, and I was holding forth loud and constant. I forget what I was gassing about, and it doesn't matter; but I was a cocky young squirt in those days, and you can bet I was blowing my horn good and proper. Hagen was holding forth, too; not so loud as me, but nastier. He had a way of talking as if you was just dirt, and it made you want to knock his face in.

"I *would* have smashed his face in if we hadn't been standing with our backs to each other, when I heard him say a

gentleman couldn't make his voice heard in the world nowadays because of the noise of the vulgar and ignorant. I knew that was a shot at me, so I jabs my elbow back into those proud Prussian ribs of his and I says, 'Then shut *your* mouth, you square-head.'

"That started it. I saw the boys by me duck, so I kicked out backwards and ducked too. I was just in time. Hagen loosed off and nearly blew in my ear-drum. He missed me, though, and got Long Mac instead. I'd my shelling knife in my belt. You know. Heavy great things they are, with a big brass handle. I pulled quick and jabbed backward and up. I felt it go home and heard a grunt. I judged I'd got Hagen, and it made me feel sickish. But I felt sicker when I saw the man I'd stuck was poor old Daddy Williams.

"THEN the boys started in and attended to me and Hagen. When things slowed up a bit I saw they'd got Hagen down; six of 'em, and they were sitting on him. I was in the same fix, only worse, because there was seven of 'em piled on me, including Fatty Buckle. Daddy Williams was walking about, nursing his arm like a woman with her first-born, and Long Mac was stretched out, dribbling blood and bubbles.

"Fatty weighed about twenty stone, and I was telling him to ease his weight off my lunch when someone stamped a heel on my front teeth, and I took the hint and dried up. Yes. The boys were tired of me.

"Old Doc Rowley took the floor. He'd been an army doctor once, before gin and pearling got him. He says, 'Gentlemen, we've got to do something about this, but nothing rash and hasty. There's one man hurt and another dead, or as good as. When you start blowing bubbles like that it means you've got it through the lungs and you're for it. Long Mac's a dead man—and it might have been you or me just as easily. It's serious. These two swine have been leading up to this for a long time. We're all sick of 'em. And they're dangerous. We don't want 'em. If they'd done each other in it would have been a good riddance, but they've killed Long Mac and hurt Daddy Williams, and they've got to be stopped. The question is, What do we do?'

"There wasn't much doubt about the sense of that meeting. The boys had been jerking back their gin since the morning, and they were all for scragging Hagen and me. The sooner the better. I came out in a cold sweat and I says, 'Hell, boys, it was only an accident.' Hagen says nothing, on account of someone sitting on his face.

"Rowley says, 'Dry up, prisoner at the bar.' And Daddy Williams kicks me in the ear. Rowley says, 'They're murderers and they legally ought to be hung; but there's no police within a thousand miles of Talu. We can't let the swines rip, anyhow, in case there's more killing done. So what do we do?'

" 'Draw lots who's to shoot 'em,' someone shouts. 'Tie 'em up and dump 'em in the lagoon.'

"The Doc points out that if they do us in themselves, they'll be murderers in the eyes of the law and liable to get their necks stretched. He says Hagen and I aren't worth it. He says, 'No. We can't do it; but *they* can. Let the two of 'em fight it out and do 'emselves in.'

"That bright idea hit the boys right on the spot. They went into committee on it. They got off all sorts of fancy notions about the best way for me and Hagen to scrag each other. The main point was to make sure we both got killed without risk to the spectators. They didn't want any survivors to the duel, and that wasn't so easy to fix. Daddy Williams suggested giving us knives and tricing us up in a sack and letting us get on with it. It was Row-

ley who thought of putting us on the shoal . . .

"*Woof!* That one got the entrance. Sit *down*. It's only half blown in, and I reckon it's safer that way. The less hole there is there the less chance of us stopping a splinter. We'll be all right. Things do get all right, somehow. Listen.

"TALU harbor's a mile wide, with deep water everywhere, except in the middle, where there's a shoal. At high tide there's a good five foot of water over the shoal; at low tide the sands dries out three feet and makes a sort of long, low whaleback. The strip of sand stands out smooth and yellow as gold and the water's blue. It looks pretty.

"Doc Rowley's bright idea was to dump the Proud Prussian and me on the opposite ends of the shoal, with a rifle and ten rounds and a knife each and let us get to it. The boys jumped at the notion. It filled the bill nicely. At Talu, you see, the tide rises eight feet, and if Hagen and I didn't finish each other off, the water would make a job of it. The beggars knew neither of us could swim.

"It was low water then, and they rowed us off to the shoal in two boats, and dumped me on one end of the whaleback and Hagen no the other. I jumped ashore quick and took a snapshot at Hagen while he was getting out of his boat. It was silly of me. The range was a good three hundred yards, and I missed. He dropped flat behind the slope of the beach, and so did I. Then the boats pushed off and left us.

"I lay flat on the slope, with the toes of my boots in the water and my chin pressed into the sand. That put my eyes just level with the top of the shoal. It had a dead flat, dead smooth surface, and I could see along the whole length of it. At the far end, where the sand began to slope down to the water again, I could see a small black spot. That was Hagen, taking a peep over the top, just like me. I aimed again, mighty careful this time, you bet; but I must have fired high, because I didn't see the sand fly.

"I hitched myself back down the slope an inch or two to get my head under cover, and I got a fright when I felt the water lapping cold at my knees. That made me think. It wouldn't be long before the rising tide forced me up the bank till my head showed over the top —an easy mark for Hagen. But he'd be in the same fix, too, and I saw plain that that was the time I'd have to get right down to it and shoot quick and straight and plug him. Then I'd be able to stand up, and I had a hope the boys would come then and take me off. It wasn't me, after all, who'd done Long Mac in, and I didn't think the boys would stand around and just watch me with the water creeping up and up and drowning me by inches.

"The water was wetting my chest when I took another squint over the top, and I got a start when I saw what Hagen was up to. The beggar'd piled a heap of sand in front of himself, and he was hard at it, making it bigger. That meant he'd still have cover when the water topped the bank and made me show my head. When I tumbled to that, I tell you I began making sand castles in a hurry.

"It isn't so easy, shoving up wet sand in front of yourself when you're lying flat. In the hurry I guess I must have showed more of myself than I thought. The first thing I knew was a bullet slamming into the sand just short of me. For a bit I thought I'd been blinded by the flying sand; but it wasn't that that put the fear of God into me. What scared me stiff was the *power* of the thing, the terrible weight of the blow when the bullet hit. It seemed to shake the whole bank. I thought of the bullet hitting me with an awful punch like that, and I slid back, quick, to get more cover—and found myself, by God, with my face in the water.

"I got down to it then, scooping up sand to make my cover higher. But it's queer how quick the tide rises. It wasn't long before I saw the water'd beat me, however hard I worked. It must have been some time after six when I peeped over the top of my heap and saw the whole bank was covered. There was nothing but water in front of my eyes, with a lump on it where Hagen was.

"HIS second shot was so close the splash hit my face like a handful of stones, and I felt as if a horse had kicked me. I got busy then. Get him before he gets me, was the one thought I had. I fired as quick but as careful as I knew how, and in the hurry I lost count of Hagen's shots. I lost count of my own, too. When I reached in my pocket for another round, I found I'd only one left.

"I kept that one. The light was going fast and I could hardly see my mark. Hagen was east of me and I think the light must have favored him. He fired four more shots before it got dark, which couldn't have been long; but I felt like he was firing and firing at me for ever. He'd only my head sticking out of the water to fire at, and he missed. You try sitting up to your neck in rising water with someone shooting at your face. Yes. I was glad when the light went.

"It must have been after seven then, and when I stood up the water reached to my knees. It was calm and dark and smooth as glass. I stood there, feeling the water creeping up my legs. It was bad. Once I heard splashes close to me, and I felt my back hair stand up like a cat's. I thought it was Hagen, sneaking up on me, and I grabbed my knife; but it must have been some fish jumping.

"That made me think of trying to sneak up on Hagen; but when I moved I saw that was no good. The water was all phosphorus, and I made a flaming wake you could see for miles.

"Then I did some figuring. By the time the water was up to my armpits, I'd figured out that high tide was due at ten o'clock. I knew my tides. You can't go sailing schooners about those waters without knowing all about tides. When the moon was full or new, the water at Talu rose about nine feet. In between moons it only rose eight. Or a few inches more sometimes, if it was blowing from the southeast. At low water I'd seen the shoal I was standing on dry out about three feet. At the top of high water, with a full moon, I'd sailed my schooner over the shoal without touching, and my schooner drew five foot eight. And in my boots I stand five foot six. By the time the water was up to my chin I'd worked it out that I was due to drown if it was spring tides; but if it was neaps and I stood on my toes and if I didn't sink into the sand and if it didn't come on to blow and make waves and . . . Well, what chance I had all depended on the moon not being full or new. With neap tides I had a hundred to one chance. And I'd forgotten the state of the moon. And I couldn't see it, because it hadn't risen.

"I tried to heap the sand up under me with my feet; but that only made holes and sunk me deeper. I moved about and tried to find a high place, but I found myself getting into deeper water. I lost direction in the dark, too, so I stopped where I was in case I walked off the shoal altogether.

"And the water kept on rising. It was up to my mouth. I dropped my rifle and stood on it. I got off my coat and made a bundle of it and stood on that. It didn't do no good.

"I was standing on my toes with my nose just out, and I was thinking of swallowing water and getting it over, when something touched me. I'd forgotten all about Hagen. He'd been moving

around, looking for a high spot, when he bumped into me.

"I jumped and grabbed him round the neck, and he crumpled up and we both went under. He'd got a grip of me and I couldn't break clear. I struggled hard, but I couldn't break clear, and then I began to fill up with water and knew I was done and gave up. Anyone would. That was the end. Finish. Nothing more to do and no way out. You'd think so, wouldn't you?

"YOU would. But here I am. There was a way out. I guess I was three parts drowned, and when I came to I found I was in Hagen's arms. He was holding me up. The water was lapping at his chin, but he held me up high.

"Presently he says, and he had to turn his face up to get his mouth out of water—he says, in a voice I'd never heard him use before, he says, 'Gott! Gott! Gott!' Like that. Three times. And he says, *'I can no more.'* And I says to him, 'Hold on! Hold on a little longer. It's the top of high tide, *now*, and the water's falling.'

"He tried to say something, but he had to shut his mouth to keep the water out. And I said, 'Look! It's light! It's the moon.' I saw it was a half moon. And I did my best to keep his courage up. I told him why I knew it was high tide, neaps, and how we were safe if he could only stick it out a bit longer. I felt him lift himself up on his toes and get a fresh grip of me.

"Yes. Hagen. . . . A Fritz. . . .

"Presently the water began to fall. I watched the line of it under his nose, and he could feel it. The tide had risen fast, but it fell very slow, or seemed to. Mighty slow. And Hagen was weakening; I could feel it. But the water fell, slow but sure, and he stuck it out somehow. He was all in with the strain, and presently he let me slip. He couldn't help it. But I felt bottom just in time with my toes. And after that I had to hold up Hagen till the shoal dried.

"It was after dawn when a schooner sailed in from sea. They saw us two sitting there together on the shoal, and sent a boat and took us off."

HE struck a match and lit his candle. "So that was the end of that," he said. "And this is the end of this, thank God, too. Fritz has knocked off. He's used up his ration of shells for the day most likely. Or maybe he's feeling sorry for us and chucked it. You can't tell. But I do know I haven't heard anything drop around here for a long time. Have you?"

"I don't know," I said. "I haven't noticed."

I TAKE AN ALKA-SELTZER WHEN I HAVE AN ACHING HEAD.
YOU'D BETTER GET ME ONE, OR ELSE, I'LL HAVE TO GO TO BED.
HEADACHE
HOW COME YOU NEVER GET A COLD? I WISH YOU'D PUT ME WISE.
OH I'M JUST PLAYING SAFE THIS YEAR—I ALKA-SELTZER-IZE.
COLDS
Be Wise— Alkalize
Alka-Seltzer
Alka-Seltzer Makes a sparkling alkalizing solution containing an analgesic (acetyl salicylate). You drink it and it gives prompt, pleasant relief for Headaches, Sour Stomach, Distress after Meals, Colds and other minor Aches and Pains
Alkalize with Alka-Seltzer
AT ALL DRUGGISTS 30¢-60¢ SLIGHTLY MORE IN CANADA

RUSTLERS' RANGE

by LUKE SHORT

"A lot of killings are meant to ride that way. . ."

(BEGIN STORY HERE)

EMPTY shell cases, a cold campfire, half covered tracks where men had died in the night—these were all that Mark Flood, trail boss, could find of the great Shifflin herd and the ten men who were to have met him on the banks of the Ruidoso River.

Flood, in charge, had sent Shifflin ahead with half the herd. At the time, it had seemed like sound tactics. Now, confronted by Wheat, one of the ranchers who had accompanied him, Flood saw how foolish it had been. Before a ring of frightened, angry cowmen, Wheat flatly accused Flood of having deliberately stayed three days behind the main herd so that disaster might strike it. Worse, Wheat revealed that Flood's brother had been hanged the previous year in the same territory—for having betrayed a herd and its riders to fatal ambush!

There was only one thing to do. Escaping, Flood took to the hills, seeking a trail which could lead him to the real culprit and clear his name. From all indications, only one town could hold the key—Clearcreek, hidden in a valley in the nearby hills.

Clearcreek, Flood discovered, was in the throes of a claw and fang range war for the rights to the rich Bearpaw range. The powerful Hand and Petrie spreads, recruiting any man's guns who would serve them, had broken the lid off any semblance of law and order.

Flood hired out to Hand. It was necessary. While the Bearpaw was ruled by trigger justice, no man was safe unless he could call one side his own. While fighting off an attack by Petrie riders, one of them was trampled to death in the resulting stampede. Unknown to Hand, Flood rescued Petrie and Margot Curtin, his fianceé, and let them escape.

Later, Flood was to wonder whether this gesture had been wise. For Petrie, blind to anything but his hatred, had the dead man body taken over to his own rangelands, where it was ostensibly discovered, and Hand was arrested, accused of the very crime which Petrie had tried to commit.

But Petrie had not counted on one thing—the fact that Margot would not stand by and see an innocent man framed. Told of the true situation by Flood, Margot went to the marshal's office and revealed that Petrie had hoaxed him with false evidence.

And even while this was happening, fresh outbreaks even more serious in consequences were springing up. Coe, one of Hand's men, acting without authority, had stampeded the entire Petrie herd, going to his death when the cattle swept him with them over a cliff.

And through it all, Mark knew, ran the name of Flood. Regardless of his quest and its importance, he could no longer remain and hope to live. With the memory of his brother's folly still fresh in men's minds, with his very arrival under a cloud and trouble starting wherever he went, his death was a question of hours—and it might well come from either camp.

But before he left, he could do one thing. Flood convinced Margot that he was not the hired gunman she had dreaded.

Leaving Clearcreek, Flood went to Cienga, hunting the men who had beef contracts for the town. Somewhere the stolen beeves had to be disposed of. And there he made an all important discovery. A dance hall girl, recognizing him by his likeness to his dead brother, told him enough to make it plain that the men he wanted were very close.

But the girl was so indiscreet in her talk that it had attracted the attention of others—and in this alien spot where every stranger was a potential enemy, Flood did the only possible thing. He antagonized her by letting her believe that he was not in sympathy with Gordon or his fate.

Later, he thought, he could get her aside and reveal the truth. But when a man got him to a back room on a pretext and he found himself facing hostile guns and a girl with death in her eyes, he knew his fatal error. Teresa, believing him a traitor to the man she had loved, his brother, had taken him straight to the men who could clear his family's name—but had led him there to betray him to his death!

CHAPTER XV.

PROWLER'S PREY.

MARGOT rode blindly away from Hartley's cabin, unable to still the singing in her heart. She had learned suddenly the meaning of serenity, and she thought of all those little things by which she had arrived at loving him. She thought of his eyes, so like hers. They had angered her that first day when he came to her at the hotel, angered her because they were so unlike everything she knew about the name he bore.

But now she understood him, without knowing why he was here or what it was he had to do, and she told herself she understood it with just the few words he had used when he held her in his arms. Without his ever saying it, she knew that his pride and his honor was forcing him to do this before he could come to her the way he wanted. And she could wait.

Suddenly she heard horses approach-

ing. She pulled her horse off into the thicket along the road; dismounting quietly, she put her hand over his nose so that he would not whicker.

She caught the deliberate rhythm of the passing horses, two of them. Mayhew and Honeywell on their fruitless errand. Listening to the sound die, she thought proudly of how Mark had won the loyalty of these two men, as he had won everybody's.

But back on the road again, she sobered. There was still that shadow before her of the man she had almost married—Petrie. She marveled at how incredibly, dangerously wrong she had been. She thought of the word that had caused Flood to fight Petrie, and when she remembered that she might have married this man who named her that, she shuddered.

She was afraid of him, and the dark, violent side of him he had hidden so well. Flood had seen it instantly, and was unwilling to leave until he knew she was safe.

And that reminded her—should she wait for Honeywell? No. Anyone seeing the three of them ride into town together would think it odd, and repeat his thoughts. This was one thing that must never get to Petrie, for it was a move that might defeat him in the end. She would tell him this sometime, when she told him she loved Flood, and that she had done this to save the man she loved. With Flood she would not be afraid. Alone, she was.

Afraid or not, she knew she must ride in alone. What if Petrie was still in town? What if he had tried to reach her after Honeywell and Mayhew left to serve the warrants? She didn't know, but she would have to take that chance.

SHE did not enter the dark town from this road, but traveled the ridge a mile, then dropped down into the valley and rode in from this direction.

The town was quiet and dark, except for a few lights burning in the rear of stores. As she passed the hotel, she saw the lamp turned low on the lobby desk. She turned in at the feed stable, and gave her horse over to the night boy, who went on duty at midnight.

"Any trouble tonight, Jim?"

"No, Miss Custin. Only them Wagon Hammer men in here an hour or so ago. They didn't make trouble."

She could only see the shape of him here in the dark, and knew that he could not see her. So she asked: "What happened tonight, Jim? Does anybody know?"

His answer was long in coming. "Yes, ma'm."

"What is it?" And when he did not answer immediately, she said:

"I'm sorry. Maybe that's none of my business."

"It ain't that," the boy said quietly out of the night. "Coe, a Bar Stirrup rider, along with a bunch of other men, stampeded most of the Wagon Hammer herds over the barrier rim. But that ain't the worst part, Miss Curtin."

"Not the worst?"

"No. They had to kill the seven men ridin' herd on the Wagon Hammer stuff before they could do it."

Margot felt a weary horror rise up within her.

"How awful," she murmured. "Oh, it was a terrible, terrible mistake." She thought of the warrant out for Hand, and knew this was the cause.

"I reckon Hand will find that out," the boy said, his voice sounding choked. "My dad was one of 'em. None of them seven were Wagon Hammer men, but that didn't make no difference. They were killed, shot in the back without a chance to fight."

Margot came close to him and laid a hand on his arm. "I'm terribly sorry for you, Jim, and your mother. But you must be just. Perhaps Ben Hand didn't order it done. We don't know yet. He was in jail, you know."

"He could've given orders before he

went to jail," the boy said, and his voice was adamant.

Margot pressed his hand. "Jim, every man in this country will go killing crazy. Are you going to, too?"

"I reckon," the boy said stubbornly, respectfully.

"Then I'm doubly sorry for you," Margot said gently. "Good night, Jim."

"Good night, Miss Curtin."

As she crossed the dark street, Margot began to piece together the things she had overheard that night. When she rode up to Hartley's cabin, she had heard Ben Hand's voice calling out in wrath. Mark had known of this terrible thing, and had refused to tell her what it was. Had he been quarreling with Hand over it? A fear rose in her, but she stilled it. Something was wrong, all wrong. Hadn't Honeywell given her leave to warn Ben and too, and did not that prove that neither Mayhew nor Honeywell believed them guilty? But when she thought of the fire this would touch off among the families on this range, she was sick at heart. And to head this injured faction would be Petrie, who would use their anger and their blood to win his quarrel with Ben Hand.

She entered the hotel and heard how weary her footsteps sounded. Her fear of being alone was gone now, supplanted by the news Jim had told her.

Passing the desk, she moved the lamp against the wall, and turned it very low, then walked back to her room. Here, she moved in the dark with the confidence of familiarity. Lighting her lamp, she wondered if Lee was awake in the next room. He had been asleep when Honeywell came to see her, and she had not wakened him, but now she wondered if he might not want to hear all this. She decided against waking him, remembering how his frail body needed sleep and rest.

She turned away from the lamp on the stand near her bed, drawing off her left glove. Then she stopped abruptly, as she caught sight of her dresser. Its drawers were open, the contents piled awry on the top. A trunk under the window serving as a seat had been opened, and papers were scattered about.

Seeing it, she felt her spine go cold with fear. With a soft cry she ran to the trunk, dropped on her knees and started pawing frantically in a back corner of it. Then she stopped, and slowly picked up a slim sheaf of letters that lay on top the heap of clothes.

Rising, her face white and taut, she ran across the room out into the corridor, and broke into her brother's room, crying even as she opened the door: "Lee! Lee! They know! They've found out!"

It was dark here and quiet. She paused, waiting for him to rouse from sleep and answer her. When he did not, she moved swiftly across the room to his bed and shook him.

He did not move. A crawling, growing terror started within her. She fumbled at the table, found a match, dropped it in her haste, and found another and struck it, turning to the bed while the match still flared.

Then her scream rose and filled all silence with its terror. The match still burned. Lee might have been looking at it, for his head was turned that way, his eyes open. In the middle of his forehead was a jagged bullet hole.

THE next Margot knew, the cook was standing in the door, shapeless in a vast sleazy wrap. She had a lamp in her hand and her face was still loose with sleep. Margot ran to her, a grief of hysteria wracking her body with great, wild, heartbroken sobs.

Jim, the stable boy, was next in, and Mrs. Cooney motioned him to the bed.

"Tell Sam Honeywell," she said. She led Margot down the corridor into her own small, plain room, and moved her over to the bed. Margot lay on it, face

"Murder ain't part of this fight!"

down, crying brokenly, while Mrs. Cooney put the lamp on the table. Then she sat on the bed, her back against the foot of it, and gathered Margot into her arms, fondling her, crying herself.

Sam Honeywell and Max Mayhew found them that way, after Jim had hunted vainly for them at the office and both their houses and had come back to find them riding into town.

Mrs. Cooney motioned them away, then got up and closed the door. Mayhew looked at Sam in the dark corridor.

"That ain't part of this fight," he said quietly.

"No," Sam said. "I think this is my fault, Max."

"No. Flood would never have expected this, nor will he blame you."

He went back to Lee's room, while Honeywell leaned against the corridor wall and waited. When the door opened, Margot stepped out. Sam took his hat off and began to speak, and Margot said: "I know, Sam. Go in the room and wait for me."

She went on up the corridor, Honeywell watching her, and turned into her own room. In a moment, she returned to Mrs. Cooney's room, and Mrs. Cooney left. Honeywell stood by the bed, his face more sad than usual.

Margot sat lifelessly in a chair, and Sam said: "You want to talk, Miss Margot?"

She nodded, feeling the slim sheaf of letters inside her blouse, fighting the grief out of her mind so that she could answer his questions. "You know all I do, Sam. I found him just that way."

Sam could be blunt when he wanted to, and he wanted to now. "Petrie could have had a man watching you when you left town. Maybe he knew. Maybe that's his revenge." He studied her clean, modeled head as she listened to this, and when she looked up at him he was proud for her.

"Sam, you know all that's passed. Do you think Loosh would do that?"

"Do you?"

"No. I guessed wrong about him once, Sam, but not that far wrong."

Sam said nothing, waiting for her to go on.

"It was robbery," Margot said simply. "My dresser and trunk were rifled."

"I saw that coming in," Sam said, and he saw the swift shadow of surprise and fear cross her face. He went on placidly: "That don't explain Lee. Why would they rob your stuff and kill Lee while he slept?"

Margot said: "I don't know."

Sam's voice got a little stronger, but it was still gentle. "Something they found made it necessary to get Lee out of the way. Wasn't that it?"

Margot said without looking at him: "It's reasonable. I—"

"Don't lie," Sam said kindly. "You know what it was. You went back to get it." He sighed and sat down on the bed, hat in hand between his knees. He spoke conversationally now, and the e was no hint of reproof in what he said. "You and Lee come here a year ago, Margot. Nobody knew where from, although you both said the East. You bought this hotel and lived here in this little cow town as if you meant to make yourself like it the rest of your life. I've often asked myself why."

She was watching him now with cautious eyes, saying nothing.

He went on: "You didn't come here because you l'ked it. You came here for something. I've thought that a long time, and never said it." He juggled his hat a little, and looked up at her, his heavy face alert now. "You won't say why you come, or where you come from. All right. I reckon that means you don't want our help much, don't it?"

Margot said: "Sam, I—"

He cut her off by raising a hand. "Don't tell me anything you don't want me to remember." His hand dropped gently, and he smiled. "I can be a curious man, and then again I can't. I never aimed to be a righteous lawman. I'm one that thinks a lot of killings are meant to ride that way, that everyone is better off if they go unsolved. It's a logical way to settle a lot of things, and if some men are driven to doing it, then their way should be respected. Some men, understand? Most killings, though, are bad. I knew Lee, and I wouldn't say he had ever done anything that called for this. Has he?"

"No," Margot said, her voice faint.

"And still you don't want our help?"

Margot stood up suddenly, clasped her hands in front of her and walked across the room. She paused before a blank wall, turned and walked back to Sam. Leaning against the foot of the bed, she said: "Yes, Sam. I want your help. But not in this."

"All right."

"I have got to get out of here," she said slowly, trying to make her voice calm. "I can't tell you why, Sam, but I must! As soon as Lee is buried, I have got to go!"

Sam said quietly, meaning no question: "To Flood."

"Yes."

HE looked up at her. "You're afraid."

"Yes."

"Even with me around, like I promised you and Flood I would be?"

"It's past that now, Sam," she answered, a note of hysteria creeping into her voice in spite of all she could do.

"What is it?" Sam said sharply.

Margot moaned, and covered her face with her hands. "Oh, Sam, I can't tell you. It wouldn't do any good, and it would only pull you into it, too. I don't care now. All I want is to be free." She looked pleadingly at him, and for a moment a great pity seemed to gag him to silence.

"Sam, I don't want to die! Before tonight, I wouldn't have cared, but now I don't want to! I can't!" She quieted herself and said more calmly: "Do you believe, Sam, that you have to snatch and steal and fight for all the happiness you can get in this world?"

"Some people do."

"I'm one of them, Sam. Oh, I know it sounds cheap for me to say this with Lee in there. But he's past help! He

died because—on account of this thing that I'm running away from. But I don't care now! I love Mark! He's my whole life, my everything! With him I can come back and fight it! But without him, I'll die! I know I will!"

"Killed, you mean," Sam said.

Sam said kindly: "Sure this ain't made you imagine things?"

"No," she said earnestly. "Please believe me. Lee's body in there will tell you how little I imagine it."

Sam nodded, looking at his hat. He said, without looking at Margot: "I reckon you know that you are riding to join a wanted man. If he ever comes back to this range, we'll have to pick him up."

"Do you believe that charge, Sam?"

"No. That ain't the point. Petrie brought in a little rat-faced man from God-knows-where tonight who claims he was a rider with the Munro herd when Gordie Flood's gang rustled it. This man says Mark Flood was riding for Munro, too, and that Mark was the man who suggested Munro use this Ruidoso trail into the American. He says Flood had his brother's gang waiting there to steal the herd."

"Do you believe it?" Margot asked in a small voice.

"No. But it's evidence enough to pick Flood up for questioning. Only trouble is, if he ever got inside this town again, Petrie would ride in here and get him. I'm telling you this because that's the man you aim to join, a man who has to travel at night or clear out of the country. Do you still want to?"

"Of course."

Sam juggled his hat now, watching her. It took plenty of courage to tell her this next, and he wanted to draw strength from the clean, proud look of her. He said then:

"I saw Emory out at Hartley's."

Margot said nothing.

Sam said: "You ought to know this. God knows I don't like to tell you."

"What?"

"Hand and Emory claim that Flood set Coe up to this stampede and massacre. Hand is through with him, Emory says."

"That's not so," Margot said gently. She was feeling no fear, and she watched herself for a beginning of doubt, but it never came.

"I'm just telling you," Sam said.

"Do you or Mayhew believe that?" Margot asked.

"Hartley said Flood denied it."

Margot touched Sam's shoulder. "Sam, are you beginning to regret letting Mark go? Do you think you made a mistake?"

Sam said: "Not if you don't."

"Then believe in him, Sam. He's all I've got. I think he's all you've got, too, if you only knew it. If any man can avenge poor Lee or if any man can save me, he is the man."

CHAPTER XVI.

PATH OF LEAD.

SAM and Mayhew had plenty of time to talk it over in the blacksmith shop, waiting for Dave Wolff to make the coffin. They sat on a bench near the forge while Dave worked in the back end by the light of a kerosene lamp with tools that were strange to his rough hands. Mayhew had listened to Sam's account of Margot's action with a shrewd, silent gravity, nodding occasionally. When Sam was finished, they fell silent, talking only now and then.

Mayhew said on one of those occasions: "There's one thing that makes me believe she is really afraid." He pointed over his shoulder to the casket. "She loved that boy, and now he's gone, she's leaving—fast."

Sam nodded, and did not speak. He rolled a cigarette in fingers that hid the paper, even hid the movements, but when he put it in his mouth, it was round and firm and delicate. Day was

graying the streets outside; already the fresh wet smell of morning was sifting through the wide shop door.

"In the end," Sam said, "we couldn't protect her. She knows that."

"Maybe it's best," Mayhew said. "If she can get to Flood, that is."

Sam said: "Men we know—would they ever kill women?"

"She ought to know. She don't spook easy and she don't lie."

Sam grunted and sat motionless, musing. Soon he called back to the blacksmith: "How long, Dave?"

"Fifteen-twenty minutes."

Sam said: "I'll go along."

At the feed stable, he found the team hitched to the buckboard. He asked if the boys were in yet, and Jim said yes, that they had finished.

"The ground's soft out there. No rocks," Jim explained and added somberly: "I'll find out today."

Sam looked at his youthful face, at the square set of the bony jaw and the hard eyes, sober and cold.

"Rather I'd tell your ma about it, Jim? She don't know, does she?"

The boy looked at him in bitter fury. "I'll tell her myself! You get hold of Hand again. I'll see he don't walk out again like he did last night."

Sam's slack, sad face did not change, and he said nothing, so that the boy turned away, a little ashamed of his outburst.

"Drive the team down to Dave's and then go home," Sam told him.

He crossed to the hotel in the half light and found Margot in her room. She was dressed in a buckskin skirt and thick wool blouse and jacket. She was sitting quietly on her bed.

He saw her eyes were dry and steady, but they held a sadness that Sam hated.

"If you could wait a while, we'd have a preacher here for him."

"No one knew him well, Sam, except you, perhaps. I—I don't want strange people mourning him."

"Steady," Sam said.

"I'm all right," she said tonelessly.

"The rig will be around in back pretty soon. You better tell Mrs. Cooney to fix you something to eat."

"All right."

Sam felt a quiet rage throttling him when he looked at her and saw how this had broken her. But he knew that in the end she was unconquerable and that comforted him somewhat.

"What do you aim to do with this place while you're away?" he asked.

"Mrs. Cooney will run it. She can. I don't care."

She went out. He went down to his office, leading his horse down the street from in front of the hotel and tying it. It was light enough to see in the office now without a lamp, and he plodded to the gunrack. He chose a Winchester with a long octagon barrel, and levered it open. There were two shells in it. Hefting it, he sighted it, then walked out and rammed it in his saddle scabbard. The boot was made for a shorter gun, so that it stuck up and out further than it should have. He considered this a moment in silence, his slack face musing; then he dismissed it.

When he saw the buckboard back up to the blacksmith shop to receive its load, he turned up to the hotel again.

He found Mrs. Cooney and told her to go in with Margot. Mayhew came presently, and they went through the long corridor to the back door and waited for Dave to drive down the alley and pull up.

They carried the coffin in, Dave shambling along with a hammer in his belt and some heavy nails jingling in his dirty shoeing apron. The job was quickly done, and Sam winced for Margot when Dave drove his nails into the staunch coffin, the measured sound of his hammer racketing through the lower floor of the building.

"This ain't the first one of these I'll make today, nor tomorrow," Dave said into his sandy mustache. Then, upon

further consideration, he added: "Nor for a hell of a while yet."

THEY maneuvered the coffin out into the buckboard, where Dave said: "I'll drive out for you if you ain't got a man."

Sam said all right, and Dave untied his apron and put on a dark coat over his hunched shoulders. He had done this so many times, Sam thought, that his kindness had got to be a habit. An old man, who knew how to keep silent. Sam was glad of that.

"Drive around in front, Dave. We'll be with you in a minute."

They got Margot and Mrs. Cooney and went out. Margot was horseback, as were Sam and Mayhew. Mrs. Cooney rode with Dave. It was full light when they left the main street and took the road that wound south out of the valley to where the hills widened out a mile from town. It was a flat stretch shaded by evergreens, a small shelf scooped out of the hillside. The morning sun was just touching the ridge of the hill behind it. Through the trees could be seen the pine headstones of a few graves. There was a mound of new earth farther back in the grove, and Dave drove to this and pulled up a little ways from it.

He took off his hat, as did Sam and Mayhew. Dave took the ropes from the bottom of the wagon, snubbed them to the tree closest the grave, then stretched

"You've asked for this," he said. "Talk yourself out of it."

them taut across the top of the grave and held them.

Honeywell and Mayhew placed the coffin across the ropes, while Dave leaned back pulling to keep the ropes tight.

Sam turned to Margot, his eyes questioning.

"Go ahead, Sam," she said. He unsnubbed the rope from the tree, and with Dave at the other end of the rope, he let the coffin slowly down into the grave.

Margot came up, looked down at it, her mouth quivering. The others watched her in silence, as she picked up a handful of dirt.

"God bless you," she said simply, and dropped the dirt into the pit in a sad, complete gesture that made Sam turn his head away.

She walked back to her horse, and Dave came up to her, along with Sam and later the sheriff.

"I'll tend to the marker, Miss Curtin," he said.

"Thank you, Dave." She looked at the others, too. "You are all kind to me."

Dave instructed Mrs. Cooney to take the team back, and he walked over to get the shovel from the buckboard.

Sam said to Margot: "You're riding away now?"

"Yes. I won't go back, Sam."

She kissed Mrs. Cooney and squeezed her hand, then mounted.

"Let Max ride with you a spell," Sam suggested.

Margot paused. "All right. Just a little ways. I'm going alone, you know."

"I know," Sam said.

She shook hands with him and Sam saw her eyes were half wet and dark with grief, but she smiled at him before she turned her horse and rode off with Mayhew.

Sam watched them go south while Mrs. Cooney started back to town with the buckboard. The sun was half way down the hill now, Sam noticed as he walked back toward the grave. Dave was already pushing in the dirt.

He stopped work when Sam came up.

"Dave, Max will be back in a little while. You tell him to go on in. Tell him I rode toward town."

Dave regarded him soberly, a trace of a question in his eyes, but he said he would.

"Just forget which way I rode off, will you, Dave?"

Dave nodded, and watched him mount and ride toward the hill.

It was a stiff climb for his horse, but Sam let him take it easy. Once on top, he traveled along the ridge south until he came to some tracks, fresh tracks. He dismounted then and followed the tracks which led down the hill he had just come up. Where they ended, Sam looked through the trees. He could see the graveyard below, could see Dave filling in the grave with steady, silent labor. Here then was where somebody had been watching.

"She was right, then," Sam said briefly, almost aloud.

He hurried back to his horse. The far slope of this ridge stretched down to an open pasture between it and another higher ridge. Sam remembered that this ridge he was on flattened out to the south and the next ridge did the same, so he headed for the next ridge. Keeping in the screening timber, reached it, crossed over to its far slope and traveled perhaps two miles along its side. When it began to lose height rapidly, he dismounted and went ahead on foot, the long rifle in his fat hand.

THE place where he stopped was a nest of boulders overlooking a thin thread of trail that wound around the end of this ridge between it and a high, abrupt mesa to the south. He laid the gun down and took out his handkerchief and mopped the sweat from his face. He was breathing hard.

He watched the trail with flat, in-

curious eyes. Ten minutes passed before he caught sight of her. Her horse was trotting briskly. She made a fine picture, Sam thought, riding erect and easy, her grace lovelier to look at than her horse's. He could follow her course, missing her now and then as she passed from sight behind the scrub pinon on the hill in front of him, but then he saw her again. He watched these spots where she disappeared from sight, noting them. He noted, too, an open stretch clear of trees where she quartered toward him for several long seconds, only far below.

He remembered that, even reached down and took the long-barreled rifle and sighted at nothing in that long open stretch. Then he let his rifle rest that way, and rolled himself a cigarette which he smoked peacefully, shivering a little because the sun would not touch his side of this ridge till it was much higher.

It was longer than ten minutes before he leaned forward again. He dropped his cigarette, looked at the sky, then took off his hat and laid a hand on the rifle. A man was riding the trail below. There was something alert about his seat in the saddle, something wary, and nervous. He was traveling a little slower than Margot had been, as if these hills demanded a little caution.

Sam observed him with a meditative gaze. He picked his cigarette up, dragged in one long, sweet, cracking drag and laid it down. Then he bellied down and made himself comfortable. He took two trial sights on the open place, squirmed a little, then stilled himself, waiting.

Presently he raised the rifle butt to his shoulder and laid his cheek along the stock. It was so fat that it bulged out over the curved upper edge of the stock and almost closed his eye. But he looked down between the twin lines that led his squint out to the end sight and over it. When the man appeared from behind the trees, Sam first put the whole sight on his shirt front, then, remembering truly that a man overshoots downhill, he eased the nose of the rifle down until the front sight was fine in the crotch of the rear sight. And then he eased it down some more until the sight was fine, very fine, in the center of the man's belly. He was already squeezing the pistol grip hard, so that the shot came almost as a surprise. The barrel flicked up then, blotting out what he wanted to see, but he knew his aim had been perfect.

When he stood up and looked, the man was on the ground, on his back, and his horse had stopped almost beside him.

Sam picked up his cigarette and tried to suck it to life, but it was out. He lighted it, and then remembering that he had lighted one before, he found the match and put that one and the new match in his pocket. He didn't bother to lever the shell out of his gun. When he had made sure he was leaving no tracks, he turned back toward his horse.

He didn't bother to go down and look at the man. He knew he was dead. He knew, too, who the man was, and he found a kind of comfortable and stern relish in the thought that he had been wanting to do just this thing to Breckenridge for a long time.

"She deserves a chance, anyway," Sam thought, as he paused to regard the sky. Yes, the day would be clear.

CHAPTER XVII.

VENGEANCE ROUND-UP.

IN that first quiet moment of facing these men, Flood knew that Teresa had betrayed him in order to save herself. These were the trail rustlers, and Flood did not doubt that Teresa had told them he was in town to avenge Gordie's death.

He drew a long, deep breath and singled out the leader, the man who had

asked Teresa the question. The other men waited for him to speak, and kept glancing at him. Like them, he was dressed in soiled waist overalls, flannel shirt, greasy Stetson and half-boots, and like them, he wore a gun at his hip. But unlike them, he was unshaven, and his eyes were a little whisky-veined. Flood noted the loose face padded with fat and unsupported by the sagging muscles. His lips were thick and parted and his eyes so greedy that they drew all his other features into the impression of a swine's face.

This man said: "Sit down."

Flood pulled a chair out and sat down. So did this man, although Teresa and the others stood.

"I hear you're looking for your brother's friends," the man said.

"Have you talked to Brothers?" Flood asked easily.

"I talked to him," the man said. "Then Teresa got hold of me. So you are looking for Gordie's friends, huh?"

"Sure, I am. Flood said openly. "It took you long enough to find me."

"Be careful, Klaus," Teresa said coldly.

Flood looked up at her, his face thoughtful. then he looked at Klaus.

"She told you, didn't she?" he asked slowly.

Klaus smiled. "Sure, she told us."

Flood spread his hands. "Well, then, let's talk business. I can spot you the trail herd—the date they'll pass, the number of men, everything you want to know. If you can get rid of—"

"Wait a minute," Klaus cut in. "What are you talking about?"

Flood looked again at Teresa, and this time he scowled. He said to Klaus: "Didn't she tell you?"

Klaus laughed shortly. "Yeah. That you was lookin' for the men that was in trouble with Gordie."

"I am."

No one spoke for a moment, then Klaus said: "She said you aimed to square things with us over Gordie's death. She said you aimed to gun the whole bunch of us if you could find us."

Flood looked up at Teresa and his eyes were hard. "What's the game, sister?"

"He's lying, Klaus! He's lying!" Teresa cried savagely, her face contorted with anger. "He hunted me out and asked me if I knew the men Gordie ran with and when I told him I might and asked him why he wanted to know, he just put his hand on his gun and smiled!"

It was a skilful lie, skilfully told, Flood saw, and it was told in desperation, because Teresa believed that Flood would eventually find these men and tell them of her hatred for them. She had betrayed Flood before he could betray her, and although he pitied her and admired her courage, he saw that she had started a play he must finish.

So what he said now was without pity, and was as cold and convincing as he could make it. He said:

"Sister, you've cut your own throat. You hunted me up in the barroom and you made me the proposition. You thought I had come here to even scores for Gordie, and you talked without finding out the real facts. You offered to point these men out to me if I would kill them. When I refused, you slapped my face and left me. And because you were afraid I'd double-cross you, you lied to these men so they would get me out of the way before I could talk." His voice was stern and implacable now. "You named Brothers and Colson as two of these men. I parleyed with them and told them why I was really here. But you thought you could talk to these men before I could move."

He leaned back now and said: "You asked for this. Talk yourself out of it."

Teresa's face had hardened, but she had perfect control over herself. Speaking to Klaus, she said: "Believe him and you're a dead man, Klaus."

"Talk to Brothers," Flood said gently. "Find out why I'm here. When I first

came in here, I thought she had told you the truth—that I wanted to talk business with you. Ask Brothers about that."

Klaus drummed on the table in slow, thoughtful monotony. Then he turned ponderously in his chair and said to Teresa: "How would he know about Brothers if you didn't tell him?"

"I did mention Brothers!" Teresa lied desperately. "I told him to go to Brothers and work with him, because Brothers was hunting the same men he was. I knew Brothers would take care of him before he could do any harm. At least I hoped he would."

Flood said flatly: "You lie. You told me Brothers and Colson were two of the men responsible for Gordie's death. When I told you I wasn't here for that, and that I wanted them to help me swing a business deal, you slapped my face." He hammered this home, knowing it was the chief proof of what he was saying. "If you doubt that," he said to Klaus, "ask a dozen men in that barroom out there. They saw her hit me."

One of the men said to Klaus: "I saw it, Klaus. Over at that corner table with the benches."

Klaus was utterly still for a moment, then he rose and faced Teresa. "I should have knowed better than to believe you. I thought you'd forget that rat of a Gordie. I guess you haven't.

Flood saw the fear in her eyes, and he knew she was cornered, and that from now on it would be a hopeless bluff for her. He wanted to warn her, to tell her to leave because these men would kill her, but he understood that she knew all this. She was playing a game for her life, and knew it.

Now she laughed easily. "All right, Klaus. You did me a good turn once when you brought Goldie to me. We weren't together very long, but I loved him, and I was glad for the little time I had. I was grateful to you, too, and tried to show it tonight. When you get a slug in your back it will be too late for you to say you were wrong."

Klaus only signaled with a jerk of his head to the man guarding the door, and the little men said to Teresa: "Come on."

She walked proudly from the room and when she was through the door, Klaus said: "Don't let her out of your sight, Guff."

WHEN they were gone, Klaus sat down and regarded Flood with fresh curiosity. "I was wondering for a minute, after what that floozy told me."

There was no apology in his tone, only explanation. He continued bluntly: "You ain't very careful."

Flood said: "Careful enough."

"How did you know you weren't putting your proposition up to a bunch of U. S. Marshals?"

"I was bluffing," Flood said frankly.

"How bluffing?"

"I figured she might try and double-cross me to save herself. When I saw you, I guessed you might be the crew Gordie worked with, so I put the proposition up to you because I had to talk first." He smiled meagerly. "If I hadn't talked first, I never would have talked, would I?"

"I reckon not," Klaus said bluntly. "Talk now."

Flood shrugged. "I told it to you straight. I can show you the stuff if you can get rid of it."

"What stuff?" Klaus asked cautiously.

Flood leaned back. "All right. Now you talk."

One of the men behind Klaus pulled a chair out and sat down. The others did the same. They kept looking at Klaus and Flood, waiting.

Klaus said finally: "What do you know about us? Maybe I don't know what you mean."

"Maybe not," Flood said.

Klaus said, after a long wait: "You mean cattle."

"I know when a herd is going to hit the Ruidoso. I know within three days. I can tell you how many men there will be and where they will bed down the stuff. I can even get in with them so you can place your men."

Klaus' eyes changed a little, shone a little through their sleepily suspicious dullness. He said: "What's that to us, to me?"

"I don't know," Flood said easily. "What is it?"

"How do you know all this?" Klaus asked swiftly.

"I am supposed to join them at the river. Right now I'm supposed to be picking out a way off the trail to get a herd up into the Colorado mining camps without swinging over to the American."

"How many?" Klaus said.

"Close to three thousand."

Klaus looked fleetingly at one of the men, but his face was impassive. He said to Flood: "How did you know where to come?"

"Gordie was killed trying to rustle a trail herd down by the Point Loma badlands. There's only two towns close to them. Clearcreek and Cienga. That girl did the rest."

Klaus said: "And how do we—what you got to prove that this ain't a trap worse than the one Gordie walked into?"

"Nothing," Flood admitted. "What have I got to prove that the lot of you won't gang up on me when you know what I have to tell you?"

Klaus said a little mockingly: "Why, we wouldn't do that. This would be a business deal."

"That's it. A business deal. You take care of yourself and I take care of myself," Flood said coldly.

Klaus considered him a quiet moment, and said nothing.

"You take a long chance on believing me," Flood went on, "but I take a longer chance after it happens. That's fair, isn't it?"

Klaus ignored this and said softly: "It sounds good. Maybe you come to the right place."

Flood nodded.

"Understand," Klaus said, "I can't"—he paused and said quickly: "—what cut do you expect out of this?"

"A third in the bank before I tell you a thing.

"That's plenty," Klaus said, after a pause.

"Two thousand cattle for you is better than none, isn't it?" Flood countered. "I'll be with you, so that if I'm lying you'll have me. When it happens, my share will be in the bank in my name, so you won't have any reason to kill me for my money. Besides, that would be poor business, because I can likely bring other herds this way."

Klaus smiled meagerly. "You've thought this all out, ain't you?"

"It's a business deal," Flood said coldly. "We can leave out all those speeches about trusting each other, because we don't."

This time Klaus laughed, and Flood guessed it was with grudging admiration.

Flood went on carelessly: "The details I'll discuss with the man that pays you. Nobody else.

Klaus' smile vanished. "The man that pays us?" He paused and his face got wary. "Nobody pays us, Flood. "I'm the boss here, and I run this with nobody over me."

Flood only smiled tolerantly, and repeated: "With the man that pays you."

Klaus said: "I say I'm the boss here." Without turning, he said to the men: "Ain't that right, boys?"

They said it was.

Flood shook his head. "That's too bad. When you come to your senses, I'll talk business."

KLAUS stood up, his chair scraping loudly. "You'll talk business now, mister."

"If you kill me now, you've lost a nice piece of money," Flood said calmly, with-

out getting up. "You can't get the cattle without me."

"We've got others without you," Klaus said quickly.

"And lost three men doing it."

"Not that. Another herd," Klaus growled.

Flood gave no sign that this meant anything to him, but he knew the reference was to Shifflin's herd. He said: "Maybe you aren't interested in this at all, then."

Klaus leaned over the table. "But maybe you are. You'll never get away from here knowing what you know. We'll see to that."

"Exactly," Flood said. "You say I can't leave because you won't let me. And I won't talk to understrappers. That puts me here with information you want, and you with men enough to act on it." He smiled and shrugged. "We might as well come to an agreement now, because I don't intend to wait."

Klaus glared at him in silence. Then he said: "Why do you think I ain't boss of this outfit?"

Flood leaned across the table. "I know greed when I see it, Klaus. If you had been running this, you would have taken up my proposition without a question. I could see it in your face. But you haven't said yes or no, yet. You can't until you see the man that pays you." He leaned back again, then said: "You are not the man I deal with. Take me to him."

Klaus cursed him, and Flood only looked bored. Klaus ceased then and said meaningly: "What if there is a man above me and I won't take you to him? What about that?"

Flood only smiled. "You are a fool, Klaus, but not that big a fool. Four men here have heard me offer them a chance to make a nice little stake. Do you think they are going to stand by and see themselves done out of it, just because you like to bluff?"

Before Klaus had a chance to answer, Flood rose indolently from the chair. "I'll wait till morning, Klaus. If you haven't changed your mind by then don't ever bother to change it. Take me to the man that pays you, or we'll forget all this."

"Will we?" Klaus said softly. "You seem to forget, mister. This is our town. Things happen here that don't happen other places."

Flood said calmly: "But not to me, Klaus." He drew out his pipe and packed it, saying: "For an understrapper, you are a loyal man, Klaus. But I don't do business with understrappers." He tapped his chest with curved forefinger. "I call the turn from now on. Don't forget that. Tomorrow morning is the deadline."

And saying it, Flood knew he was forcing their hand. If the man who paid them lived over the mountains, if he was one of those men fighting for the Silver Creek range, as Flood was sure he was, then there would not be enough time to get to him with the name Flood. Either these men would take him to the man he wanted to see, or they would kill him.

He lighted his pipe, under the hot stare of Klaus.

"Is there a hotel in town?" he asked.

When nobody answered him, he said: "If there is, you can find me there. Good night to you."

He opened the door, his back crawling, and turned into it. Closing it behind him, he paused in the act, glanced at the five silent men, all watching him; then he smiled a little past the pipe clenched in his teeth and closed the door.

AT the head of the corridor, he did not pause as he wanted to, for he knew Guff, the little man, would be watching from somewhere in the room and would note that he stopped to look for Teresa. And that was what he was doing, although he did not stop to do it, nor show it when he caught sight of her alone at a table on the far side of the room.

Flood knew without anyone telling him that Teresa was marked for death. She had betrayed herself, and they would get her. With the law in the town on the side of her enemies, she could turn to no one. She was cornered.

Halfway through the crowded room, Flood caught sight of Guff dawdling over a drink at the bar. He stood so that he could see Teresa. Flood knew he must get her out of here some way, but he did not know how yet.

He idled over to the tables, and stood watching a faro game. He watched it without seeing it, looking up occasionally at the faces of the players and the watchers. Across the table from him was a drunken miner, who was gambling with a kind of smoldering patience that was shortening each time he lost. Beside him was a percentage girl trying vainly to get him away from the table while her interest and his money lasted. The man was sullen, unheeding, and the house man was watching him with a pitying, polite look.

Flood sized up the percentage girl with a curious quickening of his pulse. Perhaps this was what he had been waiting for. He stretched on tiptoe, watching the play, so that anyone observing him might think he was not able to see well from where he stood. Then he sank back on his heels and moved along the fringe of watchers, pausing occasionally to look at the play. He did this until he was directly behind the girl and the miner, and then he gently wedged his way through the onlookers until he was next her.

Flood heard her say to the miner: "You promised the next time you lost."

The miner said nothing. Flood said from beside her, so that the miner would not hear: "He ought to quit."

The girl, a blonde big woman with a placid, thick face, turned to Flood with good natured despair. "He's gotta' lose his poke first."

Flood smiled at her and she smiled back, considering him as a possible customer she might shift her attentions to. Flood had some gold coins in his hand and he stacked them in his fingers so they touched her arm.

He said quietly, without looking at her: "Would you like to earn these?"

She looked down, while he glanced over the circle of heads opposite him to the little man, who was drinking, watching Teresa.

"Sure," the blonde girl whispered.

Flood put the money in her hand. He said: "You see Teresa over there alone at that wall table?"

The girl looked and said she did.

"When your friend loses enough so that he wants to quit, take him over to her table and sit down with Teresa."

"Why?"

"Tell her to sit there until the commotion starts. When it does, tell her to get out of here and go over to the hotel and register under the name of Flood. Have you got that?"

"Yes."

"And when she has done that, tell her to go up to the room they give her."

"Is that all?"

"No. Tell her if she doubts me to get a gun before she comes up." Flood put more coins in her hand. "With this," he said.

"All right," she answered, taking them. "What else?"

Flood handed her another stack of coins. "That's for a pair of red shoes to remind you to keep your pretty mouth shut."

The girl wasn't looking at him now, and she smiled. Flood waited a moment, then backed out and walked over to a monte table. He watched this for a while, then left it for the bar. Guff was still watching Teresa.

Flood stood up to the bar beside him, and Guff grinned impudently.

"You don't look like a cowman," Flood said dryly, "so have a drink with me."

"I can't find a poker game, so I don't mind if I do."

Flood smiled. He was looking in the bar mirror, sizing up the men drinking. It was getting late now, and the noise of the room was louder as men began to feel the evening's drinks. Flood picked out his man, a big red-faced miner in high boots and a wet hat, who was drinking Gargantuan slugs of whisky from a water glass. He picked out a second and a third possibility, all big men, all well into drink. When the blonde girl crossed with her man to Teresa's table Guff was saying: "What I can't figure out is, who believed who about that poker game."

Flood said: "That's a poor way to meet a man—by spilling his drink. Some day you'll get your teeth knocked down your throat before you get a chance to apologize."

Guff chuckled, but Flood was watching the red-faced drinker in the bar mirror.

Guff said: "I think you wanted to come."

"I was waiting for you, or someone like you."

He saw the red-faced man turn away from the bar and survey the room. The man said something to his companion Flood did not catch, and then started toward the gaming tables. To get there, he had to skirt the men at the bar. Flood watched him in the mirror until he was almost even with him, then he turned sidewise to the bar and crossed his legs. He timed it perfectly. His foot knifed into the big man's heavy walk. There was a quick tangle of feet, and the miner crashed to the floor.

Flood set down his drink as the miner rolled into a sitting position.

"You take a lot of room to get around," Flood drawled with open good humor.

The miner struggled to his feet, his face flushing angrily.

"You done that a-purpose," he growled, and his voice was thick with whisky.

"You're drunk," Flood said, smiling, his tone nicely calculated to goad the miner. The men at the bar were watching.

THE miner was a man of few words. He stepped toward Flood, drawing back his arm. Flood dived toward him, slammed up against him, his hands reaching and pinning the miner's arms to his side. Then the wrestle began, a grunting, heaving thrashing that cleared a circle for them in a few seconds. The man was as powerful as a bull, and fought much like one, with his head down, his feet digging for a foothold, but his arms pinned to his side by the clinging Flood. Quickly the crowd in the room, women in the fore, milled toward the fight; in a moment, Flood saw he was surrounded by a circle of laughing, curious faces. Guff, he noted too, was on the inside of the circle, struggling ineffectually to work his way out.

Flood shoved the miner from him, backing away himself.

"Take it easy, pardner," he said good humoredly. "You're too drunk to put up a scrap."

"Damned if he ain't," a watcher observed, getting a laugh.

But the miner came in again, and again Flood caught his arms and pinned them, so that he rode the force of the miner's slugging with the whole dragging weight of his body. People began to laugh now, watching the fight. Flood shoved him away again, and stood breathing a little hard, smiling.

He said: "Take a breather and I'll buy you a drink."

Suddenly the miner, a good-natured man himself, saw the humor in the situation. He grinned.

"Sure."

Flood took his arm and they stepped over to the bar. The crowd broke up, laughing, and Flood ordered the drinks. They both had to pause a moment to get their breaths, and in that time, Flood glanced casually toward the table

where Teresa was sitting. She was gone.

He also had a glimpse of Guff elbowing his slow way through the returning drinkers toward the back corridor. He looked at the miner who smiled and raised his glass. Flood drank with him, and said: "Maybe I belong on a horse, after all," smiling a little as he said it.

The miner laughed. "Reckon I've been muckin' around too many test pits to watch my step."

They shook hands and the miner resumed his way to the tables. Flood waited a moment, knowing the bartender might be watching him, and when, a minute later, nobody spoke to him and the bar resumed its business, he paid for the drinks and left.

Out in the night, he stopped a man and inquired where the hotel was, and then followed the directions that took him across the street, through the slow rain and the deep mud to a square building several doors down.

At the hotel desk, he inquired of an old man if anyone named Flood was registered here.

The old man nodded. "First name's Mark. Never heard tell of a woman with that name. Don't believe it."

Flood got the room number on the second floor back and climbed the stairs. When he came to the right number, he noticed that a pencil of light gleamed under the door. He knocked.

"Come," a voice said. Flood paused only a split second, then he swept the door open.

Margot was standing by the bed, straight, her lips parted a little. The light in her hair made something catch in Flood's throat.

"Darling, I could not wait for you," she said softly.

And she was in his arms, sobbing brokenly, while he felt the precious slow warmth of her body against him and he knew that all he ever would hold dear was in his arms now, and for a while he knew peace.

CHAPTER XVIII

FUGITIVES' TRAIL

MARGOT had vowed she would not burden Flood with her troubles until this thing of his that she could not name or guess at was settled. And in his arms, she found the strength she knew she would find to keep her resolve. All the tight, bitter grief of these last two days was dissolving, and the courage and power of him seemed to flow through her at his touch.

"How did you find me?" he asked gently.

"Through the notch, where you said you were going. I saw your horse at the stable and knew you must come here eventually."

"Has anything happened?"

Then Margot told him of Lee's murder, and somehow it was bearable when she told it to him, when she could see the rough strength of his face, scowling now, and his honest eyes watching her with no pity and only understanding.

"There was nothing left for me, Mark. My place is with you. I had to come. Do you see it?" she finished.

Flood nodded slowly, but there was a reserve in him that frightened her.

"Mark, is it all right? I don't mind if you are a hunted man over there. I just want to be with you, die with you if I have to."

He smiled away the concern in her eyes, and sat down on the bed beside her. He took her hand and held it in his two, yet his face was grave, and he did not look at her now.

"Who was it that killed Lee?"

"Mark," she said gently, disregarding his question, and this time he looked at her. "Is it all right?"

"Yes, except that I meant never to have you share this trouble with me. I wanted to come to you free—all of me, not just the part that I didn't need to win through this."

"But I want to help you, Mark. I have enough of you now." But she shook her head now, contradicting herself. "No. That part is true enough, but I wanted to be the kind of woman who would not possess you, no matter how much I wanted to. I can see I'm doing that now."

Flood's swift, almost fierce gaze met hers. "I want you to possess me that way. But you cannot now. There is this thing." He stood up and walked slowly around the end of the bed, then stopped, and looked at Margot.

"Do you know who killed Lee?" he asked again.

When Margot said no, he said: "Do you believe it could have been Petrie? Did he see you come to me?" It hurt him to ask it, she saw.

She knew now that this secret she and Lee had kept all this while must be kept still longer from him, as it had from Honeywell, but not for the same reason. She said: "No. I could never believe he could do that, Mark."

Flood looked deep into her eyes, and he said quietly: "You know why he was killed, then?"

She rose and came over to him and laid her hands on his shoulders. "I will not lie, Mark. I do know. I do not know who killed him, though. But you must not ask me more. That part of me died with Lee, and this must too. You must never ask me, but you will know, too, sometime."

She wanted desperately to know if he understood she was trying to spare him, and if he did, she knew it would be intolerable for him. But the question in his eyes had melted into that sleepy reserve that held no curiosity, only patience. His still dark face was unreadable. She would never know, now.

"I'll take you with me, anyway," she said.

She let her hands fall, still watching him, but a movement behind him drew her attention. The door was inching open. She said in a whisper:

"The door, Mark."

He whirled, his body shielding her, his hand on the grip of his gun.

"Come in, Teresa," he said, and let his hand drop.

TERESA stepped inside the door, a gun held before her, which beaded Flood with steady menace. She shut the door behind her, and leaned against it.

"I will take you with me, anyway," she said coldly. "That is all I want."

Flood stepped aside, and said: "Teresa, this is Miss Curtin."

Margot murmured something, but Teresa's cold glance swept Margot and left her for Flood, and her taut face did not change expression.

Flood said: "Did he follow you?"

"Why should he? I'm here, where he wants me. You even fixed it so that all Brothers would have to do would be to look out his window and see me come."

"He didn't, though?" Flood asked quickly.

Teresa laughed softly. "No. I came in the back way. I wanted to be sure I got as far as here, where you would be."

Flood said: "Do you think I got you out of that saloon to lead you into a trap?"

"Yes," Teresa said flatly.

Margot stood motionless, terror freezing her.

Flood said: "You've got to get out of here. They will kill you."

"Yes. Here or outside. It doesn't matter much, except that now you'll go too."

"Are you quiet enough to listen to me before you shoot?" Flood asked, not moving.

"Yes. That's why I came, partly—to see you squirm," Teresa said coldly.

"Then get away from that door," Flood said, and when she did not move, he said: "If anyone is out there, as you think, they can shoot through that door and kill you before you can move."

Teresa considered this, and Flood breathed more easily when she walked across the room to another wall. At least she was reasonable.

He said: "Margot, go over and sit down."

Margot looked at him, but he was watching Teresa. She went over and sat down, her heart numb with fear.

Then Flood said: "That was a fool trick to come to me in the barroom this afternoon. They knew you were Gordie's woman. They knew my name. If I hadn't goaded you into slapping me, we might both be dead now."

Teresa said: "Squirm," smiling.

Flood thought a moment, his scowl deepening the creases of his face. Then he said: "All right, maybe you can understand this. Ten men have died since Gordie. Killed by the same man. Can you understand that?"

"What of it?"

"That's why I'm here," Flood said. "To lie and fight and bluff my way into the confidence of these men, so that I may find the man who guides all this. Then Gordie's debt will be settled, along with theirs."

"So you betrayed me to Klaus, because I offered to take you to the men you wanted to get in with?" Teresa said mockingly.

"I told you why I refused you there in the barroom. You told me these men were killers, and that they had deserted Gordie. Word was sure to get to them that we had been seen together, because I gave my name at the bar. How would it have looked to them if we talked alone and parted friends?"

SHE did not believe him, Flood saw, but she was listening. So he told her, talking to Margot now, too—how the trail herd under Shifflin had disappeared at the Ruidoso; how he had been accused by Wheat of plotting this steal with the same men Gordie had run with; how he had backed away from them, gun in hand, to settle this for himself and to avenge these deaths; how he did not know until Teresa told him that Gordie had been left to die while these men escaped with the Munro herd; and how he believed that if he could find these

men Gordie had run with, he would have the men who had stolen Shifflin's herd. And he talked slowly, patiently, logically, his voice firm and not pleading, because he knew he was talking for his life now.

And when he was finished with that he did not pause, but he jumped immediately to what had passed this evening, and as he talked, Margot saw a change come over Teresa and she began to tremble violently, because she had not realized how afraid she had been.

Mark was saying: "When I walked into that room with Klaus, I knew that you had betrayed me. My only chance was to betray you, and do it innocently, pretending I believed they were gathered there to listen to my plans for stealing another trail herd. I couldn't let them believe you, or I was gone, and all your hope of avenging Gordie would be gone too."

He paused, studying her, and he knew now that his story was finding credence with her, but he did not stop.

"When I left the room, I knew what they would do with you. I knew because they sent Guff to watch you, and because there is no one in this place that could protect you. I knew if you were to live that I would have to get you out of there and then out of the country. That's why my message was sent by the girl and her miner, because if I was discovered trying to help you, all my talking would not have saved either of us." He paused. "That is why I am going to take you out of the country tonight."

The hurt and anger and defiance had washed out of Teresa's face, and she was staring at Flood with curious, almost shy look. Now, for the first time, she looked at Margot, and then back at Flood.

"I—I guess I'm soft," she said harshly. "It sounds like you meant it."

"I do. Now put your gun up, Teresa."

"Not yet," Teresa said doggedly. She was silent for a moment, trying to pick flaws in what Flood had told her. Suddenly she said: "A word from you, a note or anything, would have kept me from telling Klaus. Didn't you think of that?"

"How would I have got it to you?" Flood asked. "Who could I trust in this whole town?" He shook his head. "The stakes were too high to risk it, Teresa. I went back to the saloon hoping I could send you a word of mouth message by one of the percentage girls. I couldn't put it in writing, and I couldn't be seen talking to you."

"And have you made a deal with Klaus and his men?" Teresa asked curiously.

"I think so. I will know by tomorrow morning. I refused to bargain with anybody but the man who pays them." He said slowly: "You don't know who he is, do you, Teresa?"

"Do you think he'd be alive if I did?" Teresa countered.

"No, I don't. Now put up your gun."

Teresa slowly laid her gun on the table and said gently: "This will be the second time I have trusted a Flood." She smiled crookedly. "You see, I can't help it."

Margot rose and went over to her. "Believe me. He will help you," she said simply.

Teresa looked up at her. "Who are you?" she asked quietly.

"It doesn't matter," Margot said. "I love him."

TERESA nodded, and Margot turned away from her to Flood.

"Is this what it is, Mark? Is this what must be settled before we can be free?"

Flood nodded. "My name is pretty black now with some men. It was my idea to make up the trail herd in Texas. I was trail boss. I owe it to all these men, the living and the dead."

"But are you sure, Mark, that these men Gordie ran with, the men that stole

the Munro herd, are the same men that stole yours?"

"They let that much slip tonight," Flood said.

"And would this same man whose name you want be the one who directed both steals?"

There was pain in Flood's eyes, but he answered. "I think so."

Margot said then: "I should never have come, should I?"

Flood said: "I am going to send you away." He spoke to Teresa. "You will go together."

Teresa smiled sadly. "You don't know what you are saying. Right now they are hunting the town for me. I can't escape."

Flood looked at Margot. "Will you take her home— to Clearcreek?"

"If you say so," Margot answered.

Flood was watching her, and he said: "You are afraid."

Margot nodded mutely, and Flood stepped over to her. He raised her chin and looked deep into her eyes. "This is why I did not want you in this."

"But I am in it, Mark. You've got to share it with me."

Flood's face was drawn with worry, but he knew there was no going back now. Margot had made her bargain to share this with him. To spare her, to protect her would mean that he counted her help nothing. Flood gripped her shoulder tightly, and a slow smile broke over his grave face.

"Yes," he said. He went over to Teresa now and sat on the edge of the table.

"You'll get out," he said. "Tell me about the town now. Where does the road north go?"

To the mines far up the valley, then it split into several trails that took to the peaks, and were used only by prospectors and mountain men, she told him.

"But from there on?" Flood asked. "Do the trails disappear, or do they join other trails that will put a man into different country over west?"

Teresa thought a minute and said yes, that she had heard of men coming through over high windswept passes, and that these men had been weeks doing it, but that she had heard them speak of a desert country from where they started.

Flood said: "Then there is a way over them? You know that? You've talked to men who have done it?"

Teresa said yes, and Flood looked questioningly over to Margot.

"I can do it, Mark," Margot said quietly, in answer to his unspoken question. "I tracked you across the pass. I can make it west if you say."

Flood shook his head. "That's not the way we'll do it. You and Teresa will go back to Clearcreek across the mountains." He paused, regarding her anxiously. "You'll have to camp in the rain without a fire and you'll be wet and cold and hungry and you won't sleep. You'll travel up this mountain tonight in the dark and rain. You'll reach the top by daylight, and from then on you'll have to hurry, because I'll be close behind you. When you reach the Silver Creek range, you'll pull off and hide until you see me ride by. I'll be with another man, I think. Then you can come into town behind us. Can you do all that?"

"If you can get us out of town," Margot said.

Flood took his hat and went to the door. "Make two bedrolls from the blankets on the bed, and be ready."

He was gone. Margot watched the door, until she heard Teresa say:

"He is a kind man."

"Yes. Even when he is stern, he is kind," Margot replied softly, and she looked over at Teresa, who was observing her with a kind of detached curiosity.

Then Teresa rose and walked over to her and took her hand. "You are a fool to love any man that much. I know."

"But not Mark," Margot said.

Teresa looked away. "No. I think you are right."

(To be concluded)

Regan swung the empty belt like a whip.

LEGION

A Novelette by ROBERT CARSE

CHAPTER I

FROM DJEBEL BANI—ONE MAN

UPON the far rim of the Great Atlas the moon turned slowly and came clear, an immense white silver wheel. Snow banks gleamed on the higher slopes, then light reached down into this valley, driving back eddies of shadow. Regan had waited with his hands at the machine gun trips, his big body bent down in a corner of the blockhouse bastion, ever since he had heard the blur of sounds from below. Now he straightened, took his hands from the gun.

The man at the edge of the wire along the ground in front of the blockhouse was erect, and moonlight came fully over him. But he stumbled where he stood; his hands and the folds of his tattered native robe were caught in the barbs of the wire. His knees were giving under him; he went sidewise down, his head still lifted, and for an instant Regan distinctly saw the bearded face and the deep-set eyes.

Zamas, the little fellow who had once been a matador, was the first sentry on the wall beyond Regan. He swung at once when he heard the grate of Regan's hobnailed boots along the stone.

"Que hay?" he whispered. "I was waiting for you to settle that guy, Sergeant."

Regan nearly smiled. "You knew he was there, *chico?*"

"I heard him, Sergeant. But, you know; I didn't want to sing out. Some of these other monkeys down the wall start blasting at anything as soon as they hear an *alerta* yell."

"Take another look down there," Regan said softly. "That guy's lying so you can see his face."

Zamas stared down through the loophole, cursed before he turned back to the tall American sergeant.

"Listen," he said; "is that what you think? That guy down there is Valmaseda—the colonel?"

"Colonel Estrian Jorge Valmaseda." Regan had his hand on the private's shoulder, was thrusting him aside to go on past. "I was with him at Anoual, and in the retreat. We were the last of the regiment to come out from there. He's a guy I know."

Zamas hunched against the wall, his rifle held loosely.

"Si," he said. "Sure, I've heard that. But Anoual was before my time. I was here, though, when Valmaseda got knocked off with the column at Sidi Biroud Maal. And that's seven years—"

Regan was on the steps down into the blockhouse compound. He only swung his head back. "Call Lieutenant Pechkeff," he said sharply. "Tell him I'm going out. Tell him why, and that he'd better call the captain."

"Si, sargento." Zamas was stooped down and whispering. "You know, though. . . . This is still the Spanish Legion, but since the Revolution, things are all different. Valmaseda used to be top-boy here, and Captain Marti's got that spot now. And Marti never liked Valmaseda; he always had his hooks out for him. . . ."

"Basta!" Regan was at the great gate, pulling bars and locks. "To hell with that stuff now. Get rolling! Snap it up!"

The man at the edge of the wire was slumped in a position very much like that of death when Regan came upon him, and the gaunt head was back weirdly, the limbs twisted beneath the filthy robe. But his eyes opened when Regan hefted him up, and he spoke in a low, clear voice.

"I called; I tried to call twice. But I guess no one heard me, Sergeant."

"Si, coronel. You know the Legion; some of them still think they're paid for sleep." Regan smiled as he said that, but with his glance forward, on the gate. The gate was opened wide and Pechkeff, the stocky Bulgarian lieutenant, stood there with a file of men at his back. The file of men behind him stood at the present arms. In this outfit, Regan thought, the name of the man he carried still meant many things, was at least a great legend for any soldier who had ever scored in Morocco.

Then the man in his arms spoke again. "You can let me down, Sergeant," he said. "I should like to walk through the gate. But you may stay beside me." He staggered for a pace or so as he stood, and then walked straightly, one hand, his left, still on Regan's arm.

"Valmaseda," he said, beside Pechkeff in the gateway. "Estrian Jorge Valmaseda, Colonel of His Majesty's Imperial Army."

Pechkeff held his own salute with a formal precision. *"Mil gracias, coronel,"* he said. "It is good to see you."

BUT the tall, barefooted old man had gone on, within the gate, staring before him. A door swung at the far side of the compound and a yellow flange of light widened across the packed dirt. Juan Marti, the commanding officer of

the post, was by that door. He wore his uniform breeches and boots, but no tunic or cap. His pistol belt was in his hands; he slung and buckled it about his waist. "*Que tiene?*" he called. "*Aquí!* Who's there?"

Valmaseda tried to stand straight, and answer him. "I'm sorry," he mumbled. "But I am the only one. The rest, the rest are dead." He sagged sidewise against the wall as he spoke, reached out to catch himself, then slowly slid down.

Regan cradled him with his elbows and knees, slowly lifted him. He was erect when Juan Marti asked harshly, "Where did you find this man, Sergeant?"

"In the wire, *capitán.*"

"You know where he came from?"

For an instant, Regan looked into the captain's lean, hard face, then turned his head to the distant and immense block of the moon-held mountains. "The Djebel Bani, I guess, *capitán.*"

"He's alone—as he said?"

"I saw no other man out there, *capitán.*"

Juan Marti had made a short gesture with one hand, and two of the medical orderlies in the crowd had come loping forward. "Take this man to the infirmary," he told them. "Fix him up the best way you can. But wait a minute, *sargento.* I want to talk to you. . . . Just what the hell gives you the idea that Don Estrian Jorge Valmaseda came from the Djebel Bani, up there?"

Regan had taken a pace backwards to let the hospital corpsmen pass with the limp body of the old man in their arms. He stood now with his heels met, his hands at his sides. "I only guess that, *capitán,*" he said. "But it must have been a long way. From wherever the Riffi took him after that scrap at Sidi Biroud Maal."

"That scrap at Sidi Biroud Maal," Juan Marti said, "was over seven years ago. *Ahora,* it seems that Don Estrian has lived, to come back, and give us this pleasure. . . . But you're sure, *sargento;* no other men are out there. He came alone?"

Slowly, the wide lines of Regan's mouth pulled taut. "He was the only man I saw when I was on the wall, *capitán.* But, you heard him, just now. He said that he was alone, the last. What men would come with him?"

"It's a long way," said Juan Marti, "from the Djebel Bani to this place. . . I think you understand me, Sergeant? I think you know what I mean when I say that it is very impossible that even the legendary Estrian Valmaseda could make that trip—alone."

"I understand you, *capitán.*"

"*Buen'.*" Juan Marti laughed at him, with a quick, rough sound that contained no note of real mirth. "Because even up there in the mountains, *sargento,* the Riffi tribesmen know that there has been a revolution in Spain, and this is no longer 'His Majesty's Army'. The Riffi aren't all a stupid lot; they're aware the Spanish king is gone . . . . But you have known this man Valmaseda a long time. You must remember that in the Army he was always known as a great royalist and a man who loved his king very deeply; hated all republics and any idea of them . . . . I've got that right, Sergeant?"

"*Si, capitán.*" But Regan could not keep the anger out of his voice now. It rose up through his words, although he still spoke in his slow, usual drawl. "I can remember a lot of things. And maybe it's funny, but I haven't forgotten the time when you came out here to the Tercio. You and a bunch of other green farmer kids who had been drafted, while there was still a king in Spain. You were from the Colonel Valmaseda's home town, in back of Sevilla. Your folks herded goats for him on his *estancia.* You figured it was all his fault you'd been brought out to Africa to soldier. Then you got sore, when you found he knew you all right, but wouldn't send

you home before your hitch was up. He told you to stick along and get to be a soldier, learn to sew stripes on your sleeves."

Juan Marti moved easily a pace closer, the lids down over his dark eyes. "You forget, *Yanqui,*" he said almost lightly, "that those stripes you've got can come off any time, a lot faster than they went on. You—" But then he wheeled snapping the words short, jerking the holstered pistol at his hip up into his hand.

The sentry's call from the wall was loud, high. "*Quien vive! Alto ahí!*" The clash of rifle fire broke right across it, in a repeated pound of shots. The man who had yelled was on his knees now behind the bastion wall. His rifle was under him and his hands gripped over the hole through his shoulder. Juan Marti and then Regan leapt over him as they came up the steps.

The Bulgarian lieutenant, Pechkeff, was at the machine gun in the bastion corner. He had kicked the piece into action, sat with his lips pulled from his teeth in the shock of the recoil. He looked up at Juan Marti. "No more to it, *capitán,*" he grunted. "There was only about a half a dozen of them and they're gone now."

Juan Marti stood at an embrasure, his head and shoulders clear, the big pistol poised. "Right," he said. "But I only count four of them out there. The Moors run faster than they shoot. They got Cierro, though, and he wasn't a bad man. . . . Call 'Cease firing', Lieutenant. That's all for now." Regan stood right beside him, near the belt box of the machine gun, and the captain stared slowly at him before he spoke again:

"You're going out there now, *sargento.* I want those bodies along the wire brought in, and anything else you find. Pick a detail of ten men and take an automatic gun. I want you to swing right around the post, wide. But send those bodies in first. Maybe the ex-Colonel Valmaseda might recognize a couple of them; that's as possible as his getting here from the Djebel Bani all alone. . . . Get going!"

THE moon was gone behind cloud and the first of the dawn mists streaked wavering along the ground as Regan took his detail through the gate. The men he had picked were all old-timers. They strode in silence and separately, their rifles low against their hips. Beyond the wire, a detail that he named fell out and gathered together the bodies of the dead.

There were four of them, as Juan Marti had counted from the wall. They were tall and thin men, with hairy, hard-sinewed bodies, short beards marking their hawk faces. They wore the coarse wool *djellabas* of the Riffi mountain tribes, and the guns they carried were modern, high-power Winchesters.

"*Buẽno,*" Regan said. "Take them back, you birds. The captain wants to hold his own inquest." He waited until the detail had gone under the load of the dead and the captured Winchesters slung from their shoulders. Then he let his glance pass quickly over the rest of the men. "You know," he told them; "I don't have to sing it for you. But where there's four Riffi, there's usually a whole flock more. Step out now, and follow me."

Before the main gate of the post the ground sloped gradually away. A sharp gully, the rocky bottom of a dried-up water course, was beyond, and from it lifted a hillock almost as high as the one chosen for the post site. The *ksar,* the ancient, walled native village the post originally had been established here to guard, had been upon that crest of the little valley. But the mud walls, the squat mosque and olive orchards were a mass of rubble and withered branches now. During the internal troubles in Spain the year before, this company of the Tercio had been called back from colonial duty to handle rioters and loot-

ers, and the people of the valley had taken it on themselves to forget taxes and peace. When the Tercio returned, there had been fighting right up to the first deep passes of the Atlas, and a battery of mountain guns had cleaned out the *ksar* and every native in it.

Regan swung past that place now. On all three other sides, work details had been busy for years clearing the ground of any obstruction or possible enemy position. If any of the Riffi were here still in the valley they were along the dried stream bed or in the broken walls of the *ksar*.

The mountain men, Regan told himself, were not the kind to fight in the open until they figured it was their time. And this was not yet it.

He was on his hands and knees, scrambling up through the limestone shale of the gully, the patrol spread fanwise out behind him at three pace intervals, when he saw the stab of rifle flame from the black pocket of the *ksar* ruins. He was flat on his face and softly cursing when the Winchester slug cut the air an inch or so over the peak of his forage cap. In a whisper, he spoke to the man nearest to him, heard the words relayed on, then hitched the automatic gun up against his shoulder.

There was no sign of movement in the *ksar*, and no sound. Along the ground on either side of him he could hear his patrol crawling into position, setting rifle straps and pulling around cartridge pouches closer to hand. They were waiting for him; the order he had passed was for individual fire as soon as he opened up with the automatic gun. But he waited for an instant more, studying the position of his squad, spread flat in a line of skirmishers, and then the exact distances. The *ksar*, he figured, was still over a hundred yards away, and the post more than double that distance back across the gully.

On the ground under one knee was a big, round pebble. He picked it up and slung it over the broken wall of the *ksar*. Shots cracked in answer immediately, whipping the ground all around him. Regan smiled as he cut loose the automatic gun. The Riffi wanted this, and were asking for it now. . . . With the gun jarring at his hip he got up and ran on into the darkness.

He stopped when he believed he had gone no more than eighty yards. The two wings of the detail went past him at a steady lope and in among the wrecked walls and olive trees. They called out to each other, slowing as they fixed bayonets. Then there was the wild, throaty yell of a Riffi, the clash of steel meeting steel as the tribesmen stood to meet the Legion. But a grenade slammed with a green-blue burst of light and that voice was silent.

Regan turned back, poised with his knees a little bent. A group of men who ran stooped low to the ground had turned the far corner of the *ksar*, their gray robes and dark bodies merging almost completely with the mists. It seemed to Regan to be a very long time before the first of that group of tribesmen started to slide down into the gully behind, and he could open the automatic gun. He caught that first Riffi waist-high, sliding down into the gully, and the rest as they plunged and tried to roll away from the evil hammering of the little gun.

Seven or eight of them were in the gully yet when Regan got there, but they were all dead, and the Riffi who had lived had taken those men's guns. Slowly, Regan passed from body to body, then leapt up and out, onto open ground. This was finished, and the job in the *ksar* was done; the detail was coming back. The men walked bunched together towards him in the mist, carrying two of their wounded on stretchers improvised of tunics with rifle barrels thrust through the sleeves. They laughed softly when they saw him, and one called, "No *hay, sargento*?"

"All done," he said. "These monkeys thought they could sneak in here and pinch us off when we started back. But get down—Watch it!" The bullets slashed high up and from far away, knocked gravel and clods of earth from the walls of the gully. "All right." Regan was helping carry one of the wounded men along the level ground. "Just keep your voices down and step along quick now. The guys firing that stuff are so far up the valley you can't see the flashes."

"*Si.*" The nearest man, a big Valencian who had once been a stevedore boss, touched him on the shoulder and spoke in a low whisper. "But I thought that Marti told you to bring in every guy we found, even the stiffs."

"Marti can fry his own onions," Regan growled. "How the hell are five men going to carry eight stiffs, and two of our own wounded. *No mas.* . . . Those stiffs we sent back from the wire will be enough? All these guys are the same; they're all Riffi, and that's what the skipper wants to know."

The Valencian slowed for a second to scowl into the mist-filled reaches of the further valley, then at the sheer, jagged slopes of the mountains beyond. "They breed an awful lot of lice up in there," he whispered. "How about the old one, the *coronel?* How do you think he got down?"

Briefly, Regan cursed. "*Si;* how about him? That's one reason I'm going back. That's one big thing I want to find out."

CHAPTER II

FOR COUNTRY—OR KING?

THERE were five of them in the room where Estrian Valmaseda lay on a canvas hospital corps cot, his head propped up on a blanket roll. His eyes were keen, freed from that fevered glare now, and remained quite constantly on the face of Juan Marti. Marti stood close to the cot, his head bent a bit forward, his hands hooked up about his pistol belt in a characteristic pose. Pechkeff and the young Spanish sub-lieutenant, Blasco, stood a pace to the rear. Pechkeff held a pad and fountain pen in his hands.

In back of the two lieutenants, Weyne, the Prussian second sergeant who had come to the Tercio after the failure of the Sparticist revolution in Berlin, rested motionless, but wearing a duty belt, an automatic pistol at his hip. Regan was furthest back in the room, right inside the doorway where he had halted and made his report to Juan Marti.

But the broad-shouldered captain had listened almost impatiently to that. "*Buen',*" he said to the American when he was through. "We already guessed most of that, when we saw those bodies and the show put on at the *ksar.* But stay there; I want another witness now." He reached down and took Estrian Valmaseda's shoulder.

"All right, *señor.* Let's make a little sense now. You know me?"

Estrian Valmaseda dragged himself half way up on the cot. His bloodshot eyes swept the room and the faces of the men about him. "Yes," he said quite levelly, "I know you. But, my congratulations; it seems that you have reached the rank of captain. . . . I don't though, recognize your regimental insignia. This is still a unit of the Tercio E'tranjero?"

For a moment, the lines gathered about Juan Marti's mouth and eyes as though he were going to laugh. But then he said in a slow, hoarse voice, "*Si, señor.* But not the Tercio you knew . . . . That's gone. Alphonso the king, is gone. We've made ourselves a republic in Spain. But that news is a couple of years old. You didn't hear anything about it up in the mountains? The Riffi didn't tell any of that, *señor?*"

The last traces of fever showed in Valmaseda's face, along the high-boned cheeks above the jagged, dirty beard, in a dim flush of color. This ebbed, and the face was absolutely colorless. "No," he said, forcing the words, "I have not heard that, *señor*. But, *gracias*. . . . It is perhaps time that I knew."

Juan Marti had held back the tension of his nerves too long. Abruptly, he cursed, then laughed aloud. "You," he said, "are telling me? But, *como Moro;* you've got the Riffi style—sit, and wait for me to speak. What I want is news from you! How did the Riffi treat you up there? How did you get away? Speak up, *hombre!* I'm top-man here now!"

Estrian Valmaseda looked up and beyond through the doorway at the white, cruel peaks of the Great Atlas, tremendous against the paling sky. "I understand," he said, "that you are what you call 'top-man' here now. There is not much, though, to tell you . . . Because you must know what happened at Sidi Biroud Maal; that I had been ordered to go on and take the pass there, despite everything. The Riffi caught us in the pass, six hundred of them. They had modern rifles and two machine guns. Their leader was a man named Moulay Kheleil, a Riffi who once served in one of—the irregular Moroccan regiments here."

Juan Marti made a short sound of laughter. "What the hell," he said. "Why not say it, all out? Moulay Kheleil was a non-com, in one of the old irregular Moroccan outfits, when this was His Majesty's Imperial Army. There's a couple of us here beside yourself who remember Moulay Kheleil; he's the main *caid* of all the Riffi tribes now. I've got that right, *señor?*"

"Yes," Estrian Valmaseda said, "you have that right. Moulay Kheleil leads the Riffi tribes. . . ."

But his glance lowered then from the man before him, and his eyes slid shut. It was as though the walls of memory had risen and closed in about him, held him in a distant region where only ghosts lived and had reality. When he spoke again, it was like that, his eyes all but shut:

"Moulay Kheleil captured sixteen of us alive. We were at the top of the pass, and they had cut off the ammunition mules during the night. Kheleil waited until we had no ammunition left. . . . He had us chained together, man to man; they started us carrying our own weapons and their wounded, back into the Djebel Bani. But there was snow in the passes, and most of the men had no boots, nothing but sandals. They—"

Marti said, "Si, senor —but not the Tercio you knew. That's gone."

"The others died," Juan Marti said, "and you were the only one to live. *Seguramente*. . . . You already told me that. But you got in, and out, hey? You were the really lucky one."

There was something terrible and beyond words in Estrian Valmaseda's face and eyes when he looked up, and the passage of his breathing was harsh through his lips. "Moulay Kheleil," he said, "sold me as a slave when we reached the Djebel Bani. Two or three of the others got there also, but they died afterwards. For six years"—oddly he was smiling—"I worked with a burro, pulling around the stones that grind corn. I was kept tied to the pole that turned the grinding stones. . . . Then I escaped. I wanted to come here, and I wanted to find Moulay Kheleil."

"*Cra!*" Juan Marti was leaning a little forward, his eyes narrowed, and dark with a strange flame. "And you found him?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"He was not in his village."

"Who did you find there?"

"I found Weled Ali, Moulay Kheleil's favorite son, the man who led the tribes in his father's absence."

"You mean," Juan Marti asked, almost softly, "that Weled Ali isn't alive any more?"

"That is right."

"And you killed him?"

"I killed him."

"How? Why?"

SLOWLY, Estrian Valmaseda raised his head, but his glance was veiled and distant.

"Weled Ali," he said tonelessly, "was with his father in that fight when I and the others were captured. He took these from me. . . ."

One of his hands lifted, went to the base of his throat inside the coarse flannel hospital shirt he wore, pulled out and down a little leather case on a cord fashioned and worked in the Riffi style. He jerked the case, turned it, and the lamplight caught over the faded silk of ribbons, the bronze and enamel of medals. "I went to get them back. I wanted them, and an automatic rifle which Weled Ali had taken as his own after Sidi Biroud Maal."

One of Juan Marti's hands had gone forth, nearly touched that cluster of medals the other held. "Go on!" he said. "You mean to say you took those from Weled Ali?"

"I found him in his house at night. He awoke, and I told him who I was. Then I killed him. Two of his brothers were with him in the house. I had to fight with them before I left. But they were half asleep and unwarned, and I had found the automatic rifle Weled Ali had kept. Then I went to Moulay Kheleil's house, in the same part of the village. Men followed me. There was little time. I searched Moulay Kheleil's house, but he was not there; his women swore to me that he was out on a raid. I left then, and came away."

"*Diablo y Diablito!*" Knots of muscles played at the corners of Juan Marti's jaws. Then he forced laughter, swinging to Pechkeff and the young junior lieutenant, Blasco. "You've heard?" he said. "you believe it?"

The slim young sub-lieutenant was moving forward, pushing to get by Pechkeff and at Juan Marti, his eyes wide with a rage that was beyond reason. He stopped only when the Prussian sergeant, Weyne, caught one of his arms loosely, laughing before he said:

"Easy, *teniente*. What the hell difference how the captain puts it? All he's after is the facts."

Blasco was pulling his arm away, cursing in a violent voice, when he saw Regan behind him, read the American's calmly smiling glance. "All right," he said. "*Quietamente*. . . . I understand."

"You understand what, *teniente?*" Juan Marti had wheeled, stood very close. Blasco made a jerked motion with one hand, out, then down. "I understand, *capitán*, that this man killed Weled Ali, got back the medals which were his own, took an automatic piece that

had once been the property of the Spanish Army, and then escaped. I believe—"

"*Abajo!*" Juan Marti rapped at him. Then, quite slowly and easily, he turned to Pechkeff, not listening to the mumbled words Blasco found. "How about *you*?" he asked Pechkeff. "Our military school soldier has already let us know what he thinks. What's your answer?"

The Bulgarian hunched a shoulder up inside his faded tunic. "I haven't heard enough yet, *capitán*. There is more, I think."

Juan Marti could laugh then. He turned, and looked down as Estrian Valmaseda "Let's have it," he said. "Excepting myself, you seem to have found a pretty good audience. But be quick!"

The brooding intentness of Estrian Valmaseda's face and eyes had remained unchanged. It seemed that he had not heard or understood the violent words of the young sub-lieutenant.

"I have told you nearly all of that," he said. "Because when I went from there I was free of those men. They followed me for a time, and once, at the head of a pass beyond Taroudant, they almost caught me. But I had with me the gun taken from Weled Ali. They failed to stand against that, and from then on I was alone. I was able to remember the trail over which they took us seven years ago. I came directly here."

"Just how long, *señor*," Juan Marti said in that same voice, "were you on that trail?"

"Six weeks, and two or three days."

"From where?"

"From outside Moulay Kheleil's village beyond Taroudant."

"And no man stopped you?"

"*Ningún*. No man, as I have said, *señor*."

"But men followed you?"

"Almost always. But I believe they came to fear that automatic gun."

"Where is that now, the gun?"

"I left it behind, yesterday. I had no more ammunition for it, and the action had worn and jammed."

Laughter rose and broke abruptly from Juan Marti; his eyes warmed with it and his lips parted wide. Then, as abruptly, he sobered, was absolutely silent for several seconds before he spoke.

"*Señor*, you present us with a fine new legend. Don Quixote had his Sancho, and this outfit has got Estrian Jorge Valmaseda. No foreigner, no soldier or civilian, has ever gone up into the Djebel Bani region, and come back alive. But you're here. You insist you've done that. And I tell you that it's impossible."

"You mean?" Estrian Valmaseda said in a low undertone.

"I mean, *hombre*, that I don't even begin to believe you. Because there are a lot too many facts against you. You are a royalist, have been known as one all your life. Your one great love has always been your king. It was through him you kept your family lands in Spain, and got to the command of this outfit, then hung onto it.

"You say that up in the Djebel Bani the tribesmen who held you captive and a slave didn't tell you that the king was done, through and out in Spain. You admit that Moulay Kheleil is still alive, although he's the man who mopped up your outfit at Sidi Biroud Maal, and the one *hombre* you hate best. . . . You say you went to his village, looking for him, and that he was not there. So you killed a couple of his sons, in his place, took back the medals given you by your king, and an automatic piece, then got clear away and safely here.

"But this Moulay Kheleil is a smart man; he served for a couple of years with one of the native regiments here, while you were here, and the king was still in Spain. . . . Moulay Kheleil is smart enough to plan a native revolt with a man like you. He is known to hate all *roumis*, but he could come to trust you. Between you and him, using his tribesmen, you could take this post

and a dozen others like it, sweep on right down to Tetouan and the coast, do what Abd-el-Krim almost did."

JUAN MARTI stopped, and slowly drew his breath. His eyes were brought against the deeply tanned skin of his face, his mouth hard. "You don't want to interrupt, or deny, *señor?*" he said. "You really like my little story, in exchange for your own?"

"*Gracias.*" Estrian Valmaseda sat wholly immobile. His voice was without tone of any kind. "I don't think that you have finished yet. Otherwise, perhaps I would understand you."

"Possibly," Marti murmured, "you can understand this. You are the one man in North Africa to try to put the king back on his throne, and give everything to do it. You would even ally yourself with a man like Moulay Kheleil, bargain with him and the tribes. It would be your idea to come here like this, with a story like the one you just finished telling, and hope to disarm me, disaffect or capture this post, then go on, down towards the coast. Your lands are gone in Spain; all you've ever had is in the hands of men you've despised and discounted all your life. With Moulay Kheleil's tribesmen and the *soldados* you could hope to disaffect and get to follow after you hear, you could hope to take all this region, to Tetouan and Mellila and the sea. . . ."

Marti swung one hand, flatly out, but his voice swept on:

"Then with your *rebeldes* you'd cross, to Barcelona, to Sevilla, and try to take Spain, with the news ahead of you calling back solidly together in waiting all those who might have reason to hate the republic.

"But maybe you understand why I laughed now. Your Riffi allies followed you down too closely from the mountains. We just shot four, out on the wire. The *Yanqui*, Regan, your old *sargento mayor*, reports the valley is filled with them out there. . . . Did you really think you could come here, like this, and take this place?"

Estrian Valmaseda had pushed himself from the cot. He stood with his cruelly cut and bruised feet met together, his emaciated body and his gaunt, high face strangely tautened.

"*Señor,*" he said, "I must tell you that you are mistaken. There are a number of things that I might say to you now, but I shall disregard all but one of them: would you have the goodness to get in touch immediately by radio with your superiors in Tetouan, inform them that I am here? It is my belief that this affair passes beyond the duties of an outpost commander. I should be pleased to make myself known personally to headquarters."

Juan Marti was taking out and lighting a cigarette. He let smoke in a gray curl up towards the lamp's heat. "So," he asked, "news of your presence could be picked up by a score of operators all over North Africa, and in Spain? And the men who are waiting for just that signal of your arrival here can start getting ready? *Vete, al infierno!* Let's find better jokes."

Nerves flickered at the corners of Estrian Valmaseda's eyes. One of his hands closed and fisted, very slowly reopened. "You have come far in seven years, *paysano,*" he said in a voice he kept flat. "As your former colonel and *patron*, I should hate to see you go all the way back again, and end up with the goats. . . . There is no reason for me to stay here. Now, I simply wish to return to Spain after I have made my personal report to headquarters. That is clear?"

"Very." Juan Marti nodded. "But they would find nothing but a cell for you in Spain. We've got cells right here that are as good. I don't think that you believe I'd let you go, now you've found your way inside here, seen just how the post is armed and manned.

Moulay Kheleil would be the first one to accept my logic, although it very probably will break up the plans you've made with him. . . . *Átencion!*"

Juan Marti was swiftly crouched back, the muzzle of his big automatic caught in a sweeping arc up from the holster into his hand, then steadied

fact that you're a *Yanqui* wouldn't do you much good between a wall and the firing squad. Understood?"

"I understand the captain," Regan said, his eyes narrowed to an unblinking squint. "I just wished that the captain would understand me." Then, lightly, he tapped Estrian Valmaseda on the

The Riffi came without sound.

squarely on the chest of the man before him. But Estrian Valmaseda had already stopped.

"You've seen?" Marti asked, not turning his head, then called Weyne and Regan by name. "All right," he said when they were beside him. "Take this guy out. Lock him up. Put a double guard on the cell. If he speaks to anyone, you lose your stripes."

Regan was the one who spoke, low-voiced and slowly. "The captain is sure he is right in doing this? That the man should be held as prisoner?"

"*Valgate Dios,*" Marti told him. "God bless you, Sergeant. You've put in sixteen years in this man's outfit, working as a paid soldier for another country's flag. One more crack like that out of you, and you go into the cell next to him. Remember—those stripes and the arm. "Come with us now, *primo.* You have heard the captain?"

But words were beyond Estrian Valmaseda then. With slow and irregular, shuffling paces, like a man walking in sleep, he moved towards the door.

CHAPTER III

THE DEATH PLATOON.

REGAN had lost accurate track of the hours that he had been on the wall, and the memory of the days was a blurred confusion. But, from time to time, as he changed the position of his aching body at the tripod of the machine gun in the sandbagged bastion, he could bring his eyes back into the compound below. The line of the dead

was growing steadily there: four or five had been added every day, faster than the burial details could get them into the ground. Here on the wall the men who lived were beginning to call those canvas-wrapped shapes "the lucky ones". There was grim humor in that, Regan thought, but also some truth.

The Riffi roamed the whole valley outside the blockhouse walls. They had a permanent sniping position now dug in among the ruins of the old *ksar*. Along the steep slopes of the valley beyond, several hundred tribesmen had found spots behind boulders and the dwarfed pine and olive trees. These men carried high-power rifles.

Several times at night when the mists started to roll along the ground the Riffi had come down, gathered at the *ksar* and swept out in open attacks. Their rushes had been stopped only at the wall, and then with the bayonet and hand grenades. More than half a dozen tribesmen had succeeded in getting over the wall to the catwalk, and had died very dearly. The others finally had retreated, but with a number of the Legion to their credit, yelling back as they slipped away.

The strapping Prussian sergeant, Weyne, had been caught through the thigh with a scimitar blow the night of the first attack. Two young warriors armed with the short, curved swords and grenades they found when they scrambled in over the wall had got far enough along the catwalk to bomb the post radio shack. They had blown it to bits and with it the young operator and all his apparatus. Pechkeff walked limping and constantly cursing, the calf of his right leg torn by a ricocheting Winchester slug. Regan's forage cap was punctured where a sniper's bullet had just missed his skull. His eyes burned in his head, the lids swollen and pustulated from hour after hour of eye strain.

Since the dawn of his arrival in the post, Valmaseda had been kept continually locked up. He had been allowed regular rations, with cigarettes and a little wine. No man, though, had been permitted to speak with him, and the double guard on the cell was still maintained, inspected personally every couple of hours by Juan Marti. That job Marti had taken on himself; he had ordered every other officer and non-com to keep away from the place.

But despite his almost fanatical preoccupation with Valmaseda, the captain found time to be in every bit of action. It was he who killed the two Riffi that managed to wound and get past Weyne and bomb the radio shack. During the two main charges of the tribesmen, he fought with a bayoneted rifle. He directed the entire defense at the parapet. The fierce strength of his nature kept these men on their feet and fighting. He inspected every bit of equipment and every foot of wall, regularly relieved Regan and Weyne at this gun, sent them below to eat and sleep.

Yet, in these last days, Marti had not said a word to Estrian Valmaseda, although he was the only one to go close to the old man in his cell. The members of the guard details reported that when they came to take their turn of duty on the wall. And Valmaseda in his own fashion, they said, refused to speak with the captain, remained silent when the other appeared at the cell door. Whatever else that little town in back of Sevilla was noted for, it had certainly raised a pair of born, natural fighters. Marti might have been a goatherd in his time, but he was a pretty damn' good soldier now. . . .

Gradually, Regan brought his glance from the sun-flamed valley slopes, turned and looked down into the compound.

Juan Marti stood at the door of his quarters. He was hitching his pistol belt into place, pulling the visor of his cap down above his eyes. It was the time for the relief for the platoon now on the

wall to be turned out, and Weyne slouched at the barracks door, his weight hunched over from his bad leg, hoarsely swearing and calling men's names.

The men of the relieving platoon came forth slowly. They were stiff with sleep yet, and a little numb with the days of repeated battle shock. They pushed against each other sullenly, dragging their rifles and gear. One, a gangling big peasant from the Estramadura, tripped coming across the door-sill, failed to catch himself. The rifle slung from his hand, struck the dusty, hard ground along the foresight and the muzzle. Pechkeff snapped at him at once. "Pick it up, you clumsy swine! What do you think you're carrying, a pig home from the market?"

"*Si,*" the Estramaduran mumbled. "But the pigs I knew back home didn't wear sergeant's stripes." Then, with the peevishness of overwrought nerves and exhaustion, he kicked the piece a yard or so along the ground. "*Mira, sargento,*" he said. "Take a look! How do you like that?"

"Wait a minute." Weyne was hobbling swiftly, his heavy stick lifted. "Let me show you—"

But two men were already between him and the soldier, Juan Marti and Blasco, the lieutenant in command.

Blasco's face was unshaven and his hair tousled beneath his cap. But now he stood very straight and saluted Juan Marti rigidly. "My platoon, *capitán,*" he said. "My men, and my job. Excuse me."

Juan Marti did not seem to see the salute or hear the words. "Stand aside," he said quietly. "Now you, *hombre,* pick up that piece!"

The Estramaduran shifted his lumbering body a little, to look at Blasco and the men of the platoon beginning to bunch gradually together in back of him. "How long is this going to last, *teniente?*" he blurted. "No man in the outfit likes this *bobo.* The real soldier here is the old gentleman, the one he keeps locked up in the 'box', and won't even listen to. This *hijo*—"

"Pick up the gun, soldier," Juan Marti said, moving with an easy lightness and certainty. "Then we'll fix you with a little stretch in the 'box'."

The Estramaduran grinned, and with a hoarse rush of filthy words described the parentage of Juan Marti and then of the captain's mother. Juan Marti nodded in answer, glancing up to the wall. Pechkeff had come to the machine gun in the bastion, taken over the piece, and Regan was starting soundlessly down the steps to the compound. "Those words," Juan Marti began, "are not nice, *soldado.* You—"

IIE struck with a short blow, out from the shoulder. The noise of it was like cracking wood. The man's heels left the ground and his hands flapped high. He was slack, out, when he landed jouncing on his back and shoulders ten feet away. Then Juan Marti turned to where Blasco stood. The lieutenant was quite close to him; he stood with his knees bent and his hand down on the Luger butt at his hip. There was a wild, nearly insane look in his eyes.

"Back up!" he told Juan Marti. "Stand back, *capitán!*"

But Marti laughed at him, and reaching in over the lifting Luger muzzle, slapped him open-handed across the mouth, then, with a foot stretched out, tripped the other flat with the force of the blow. The Luger exploded twice in the dust and the slugs cracked off the far wall. Juan Marti had his steel-clipped boot heel down against the hand holding the Luger.

"That's all the fun, *teniente,*" he said. "Get up, and leave the pistol there. You're still too nice a boy for me to shoot you. *Ariba!*"

But Blasco got up holding the Luger by the barrel, pushed it out butt fore-

most to Juan Marti. "Go ahead," he whispered. "I wanted to plug you."

"I guess maybe you did." Juan Marti was dropping the Luger into a side tunic pocket, buttoning the flap over it. "But that doesn't prove much. What, if you had? Speak up, *chico*. That's your own platoon behind you."

The sound Blasco made was meant to be laughter. He was staring at his platoon. But the men of the platoon had centered their gaze past him, and upon Juan Marti. It was as if they stood there in the white glare of the African sunlight alone with the captain. They had moved from each other and stood alone, with their rifles slanted across their bodies.

"*Buen', muchachos,*" Juan Marti said to them. Then he made a little sign with his hand to Regan and Weyne where they stood a pace in back of him. "You, too," he ordered. "Back up a bit. The *teniente* is going to settle this himself. . . . How about it, *teniente?*"

For a long moment, Blasco was unable to control his voice, and when he spoke sweat streaked his face and tunic collar. "God damn you!" he said wildly. "There's only one man you're afraid of —and you know who I mean."

"You mean Estrian Valmaseda, maybe, *chico?*" Juan Marti's eyes were bleak, the lids narrowed flickering. "What the hell has that man got to do with you?"

"Very little, too little, *capitán.*" Blasco was calmer now, his glance steady and cold on the older man's face. "But you're forcing us too far here. How long do you think you're going to keep us inside these walls, like flies in a bottle, while the Riffi knock us off one by one? The radio has been knocked in, but even before that happened, you didn't send any messages. You haven't even tried to get a runner through. Not since the night Valmaseda got here has a man gone through the gate."

Suddenly, Juan Marti laughed. "You come back to that guy's name quite often," he said. "Why?"

"Because you're afraid of him, the man who used to be your colonel," Blasco said. "Because it's your idea that he's a traitor, and is tied up with Moulay Kheleil and this bunch of lice over the wall. But you don't know that Moulay Kheleil is leading that show out there; no man's seen Kheleil since this started. Headquarters hasn't got any idea we've got the Riffi on our necks. But every day we go up on the wall, and a couple more of us get our numbers. When's it going to stop?"

Juan Marti answered gravely, slow-voiced. "The regular supply and relief column will be in here in eight days," he said. "That isn't news to you, though, *teniente.*" He leaned closer to Blasco and his fingers slid up about the biceps of the other's arm with an easy, almost comradely gesture. "Now you're going to make some for us. If you come back, you'll be the new boy hero, and your girl will have all the medals she'll ever want. . . . Pick your detail right here. Any twenty men you like, with the exception of the sergeants. How does that appeal to you?"

Blasco had pulled his arm loose, stood so he could stare fully into Marti's eyes. "So," he said, "the Riffi will have the trouble of shooting us, and you'll be spared the job? You don't like the idea of mutiny, hey, *capitán?*"

"Ask me that again, when you get back," Marti said. "Now pick your men and get started. You can make a try for the *kzar* and a couple of prisoners if you want. Maybe if you're real smart you can grab off Moulay Kheleil. . . . Draw six grenades for each man. Take an automatic gun and all the rounds you want. But then get out of here!"

Little Zamas, the man who had once been a matador, had come down off the wall. He stood in among the last groups of the platoon, beside the Estramaduran, his particular friend. The Estramaduran

was still a little groggy, his mouth and eyes slack. But he straightened and bawled out also when Zamas yelled:

"What do you say, *teniente?* What are you waiting for?"

With supreme effort, Blasco grinned at them. "One at a time, you *hombres,*" he muttered. "Fall in right there."

The Estramaduran moved first, freed from Zamas; his big splay feet in their rough leather sandals spread in a tremendous pace, he rumbled words thickly in his throat. Then in pairs, or alone, some of the others, a few of the younger Spaniards, a Greek and two Russians, came sloping into line between him and Zamas. Slowly, Blasco went to within a yard from them.

"*Gracias, muchachos,*" he said. "You know what you want, anyhow. We'll be able to see the guys who shoot at us, and have a chance to shoot back. Follow me!"

They spoke only when Blasco halted them to draw his grenades and automatic gun from the armorer. The lieutenant gesticulated fiercely with his hands, then with the automatic gun when he got it. There was a shred of sheer hysteria through his voice.

"You've asked for it," he repeated. "You've said you wanted this. When we come back, things will be different; my word on that. . . ."

He opened the great gate himself, swung on through. He seemed to fill the portal like some figure out of an heroic dream. But he was forced to turn and curse and gesture. The others were slower, and less eager. But Zamas trotted out, and one of the Russians. Then the rest followed pell-mell in a mass around the lumbering Estramaduran.

THE gate slid shut. Shadow, then steel and wood shoved back the sunlight. The sentries there levered the big bars into place and dropped home the bolts. Bullets from the tribesmen's Winchesters were already ranging along the panels. The lull of the valley peace snapped in a drumming roar of fire. Juan Marti had to lift his voice high before the men of the platoon remaining in front of him heard and obeyed:

"On the wall, you! Step out, unless you want to follow them!"

They formed up and went at the double, some of them grinning, that mood of fierce tension already forgotten. But Weyne hobbled around when they had mounted the steps. He looked squarely at Juan Marti.

"That had to be done, *capitán?*"

Juan Marti rested with his head cocked a little to one side, listening to the roar of fire in the valley. "You know the answer to that one as well as I do, *sargento.* We would have been forced to shoot them here if they stayed. If any of them get back, they'll have all the silliness kicked clean away. But we're lucky. This was coming, sooner or later, and this was better than a lot of other times. Valmaseda is still in that cell; Moulay Kheleil is still on the other side of that wall. But now we've got to get set for the real show."

"Which they'll run on us tonight," Regan said, quite slowly. "After they've knocked off those poor guys, and got their guns."

Juan Marti was in motion towards the wall, did not stop or look back. "*Si,*" he said. "That's it."

CHAPTER IV

THE LEGION RALLIES.

THERE had been firing and the burst of grenades behind the *ksar* and in the further reaches of the valley throughout most of the afternoon. Near dusk, though, it had stopped, dragged out to an occasional rifle shot that was distant and thinly echoing. Now the Riffi came without sound as far as the gully between the post and the *ksar.* They

crawled on their bellies and hands and knees to the gully. They filled it from side to side, broke forward in a concerted rush.

Starshine and a little early moonlight washed the valley. The men along the post wall could mark particular targets clearly, take their time with the opening fusillades. In the face of that raking fire, the whole front wave of the Riffi assault broke and disappeared before the main mass struck the barb wire. But the wire did not hold the waves which followed. The lull of seconds in which the men upon the wall had found time during the other attacks to reload and fire again was no longer existent.

Grenades hurled by the bare-kneed and screaming tribesmen ripped the wire in great gaps. In groups of scores and hundreds the tribesmen raced through towards the wall, but swerving aside from the gate. A picked group of the younger warriors was directed there, had been given the gate as its sole objective. The big heavy duty machine gun Regan handled knocked over four of that group. But then the others were past, in under the angle of the wall.

Juan Marti had been feeding the belts for the American's gun. He yelled harshly through the last clatter of Regan's shots. "Get the gun down—move! They've got Blasco's guns and grenades and are blowing the gate!"

Then below several of the steel-cased bombs exploded at once. Marti stumbled, thrown by the shock, pitched headlong on the catwalk. The whole wall trembled; men were tumbled from it sprawling into the gout of flame and rent chunks of wood and metal from the gate. But Marti crawled back to the bastion. He caught the glowing barrel of the gun with his bare hands and lifted it bodily.

"Bring the belts! Come on!" he yelled at Regan. Stiff-legged, he hit the steps.

Fifteen or twenty of the Riffi were already through the gate. Those men carried the bombs and the automatic gun taken from the volunteers Blasco had led. Hundreds of others ran after them through the portal. Then on the wall Pechkeff loosed a flare and for several seconds foe could see foe.

An immense man with a dirtied, tawny beard and the green head-cloth of a Meccan pilgrim was the first of the Riffi into the compound. He wore the pistol belt that had been Blasco's, carried the automatic gun the young lieutenant had flourished here this afternoon. The sweep of his glance in that eerie light reached to Juan Marti's face, and his head reared back in laughter.

For the passage of a long moment, Juan Marti did not seem to be aware of the machine gun beside him, or of the words he yelled. But he could not hear his own voice, and Moulay Kheleil was coming on in wide, swift strides. He pulled the pistol at his hip, went in a lunging dive at the man.

In that instant the light of the flare blinked, went out. The huge Riffian *caid* swung aside, towards the wall, loosing the automatic gun into the darkness. Juan Marti missed him there, went down shooting and kicking among a group of the warriors who closely followed their chief. Then Regan cleared his machine gun; his first traverse blasted waist-high from one wall of the gate to the other.

Riffi leapt right over the muzzle of the gun to get at him, pawed at the tripod legs as they went down before it. But he could see that Juan Marti lived and had got free. The captain was on his feet and calling the Legion about him. Pechkeff and eight or ten others still held the steps to the walls. But the rear of the compound was filling solidly with tribesmen, and the belt in his gun had run through.

Regan stood straight and swung the empty belt in his hands like a terrible whip. Marti and some of the Legion were right beyond. He went to them

as the Riffi fell back before the wide, cracking blows of the brass-tipped belt. But the constant and monotonously repeated, "*Yiou-iou-yiou!*" of the tribesmen lifted above the boom of interior explosions. Moulay Kheleil and his special group were finishing with the Legion wounded in the infirmary, hurling bombs into every doorway they found.

But Valmaseda remained erect; Moulay Kheleil was right before him.

Marti bent and yelled close into Regan's ear when he found the American beside him. "Get near enough to Pechkeff to tell him to clear all this place here! I'm going to drive them out from in back there! *Vete, hombre!*"

The Riffi tried to stand against that rear wall and before the smoking, wrecked doorways of the rooms they had bombed when Regan came back and joined with Marti and the Legion group in their charge. But Marti brought the Legion in a closely formed line, behind the bayonet. The Riffi had no weapon like the bayonet, and no love for it. They fought with their clubbed Winchesters, knives and captured Legion guns. Moulay Kheleil stood at their center using the smashed automatic gun like a club. His great voice rang through all other sound, keeping the tribesmen together.

Those two groups met, shocked together in the darkness; then parted, stumbled from each other. But the men of the Legion still held some semblance of order, remained shoulder to shoulder without gaps in their line. The Riffi had backed away, massed up against the

rear wall, attempting to regain their breath and their eagerness to face the men before them.

Then a fluttering, oddly strangulated cry came from a warrior half a dozen paces behind Moulay Kheleil. His stumbling form butted two other tribesmen, spun them aside. He went to his knees, down and flat, his gun clattering. Another man, Estrian Jorge Valmaseda, was there where he had stood. In the darkness and the press of swaying, striking bodies, the Legion could see Valmaseda indistinctly, a tall and unreal shadow, but his voice was strong:

"*Tercio! Tercio acquí!* To me, the Legion!"

THE Legion came forward to him with their bodies wedged in the shape of an immense spear behind the bayonet points. The Riffi did not stand. They gave, turned and ran from the long blades. Moulay Kheleil was the last to go. With his cracked gun butt, he had driven forward several yards as he heard and recognized that voice, his own pitched in a yell of absolute hate. But Legion bayonets caught in over his guard, slashed his arms and shoulders. He staggered, went down onto one knee.

Marti and the old man, Estrian Valmaseda, leapt for him in the same instant. Moulay Kheleil lifted the pistol which had been young Blasco's, fired two shots almost point-blank, then seized a grenade. Juan Marti got the first slug high up through the muscles just below the shoulder, was whirled back and around by the impact. His jerking body nearly tripped Estrian Valmaseda. The old man stumbled, swung aside; the second shot Moulay Kheleil fired seemed to strike him squarely. But Valmaseda remained erect, still in motion; Moulay Kheleil was right before him. He held a Winchester taken from the Riffi he had killed with his hands. He struck down in a short blow.

The bone of Moulay Kheleil's extended pistol arm snapped like a dry stick. The *caid* reeled with the blow, his knees buckling under him. But then down, almost prone, he wheeled and ran into the darkness.

It was Regan who found Estrian Valmaseda, a dozen yards beyond across the compound. "Steady, *coronel,*" he said hoarsely, his hand up in under the other's shoulder. "He's gone. They've all gone. But they'll be back. . . . You can understand that?"

Estrian Valmaseda whispered in assent. He was leaning forward to stare through the widely pooled shadows now over the place. Figures merged dimly and swiftly near the gate. The Riffi were quitting, leaving their wounded and dead behind them.

Pechkeff was the last man of the Legion alive on the wall. But he rested slumped against the redly heated barrel of his machine gun. His panted, agonized breathing carried through the compound. His hands were at the ragged wound in his chest. In that loud voice, Moulay Kheleil called to one of the warriors in the final group at the gate, and the tribesman took time for the shot, pierced Pechkeff between the eyes with one bullet. Moulay Kheleil's voice took on a laughing note.

"*Hasta luego, hombres!*" he called in the bastard Spanish he had learned in the native regiments. "Until the next one!" Then he and the men with him were gone.

Estrian Valmaseda's fingers clawed at Regan's shoulder; all his weight was against the American. "The gate," he whispered. "See that the gate is closed, Sergeant. . . ." Coughing rose over the words. His free hand had slipped down, against his side. "Kheleil thought he was trapped here. His men would not stand against the bayonet. But he knows that one more charge will do it, when there is light for him to see and make sure of each man. . . . Call your

captain for me, Sergeant. I would like to talk—"

He sagged suddenly, a loose weight in the American's arms. But Regan answered him as though he were yet conscious, could hear. "*Si, mi coronel,*" he said.

CHAPTER V

MARTI SALUTES

THE little kerosene lamp Regan had found in the wreckage of the infirmary burned with a sputtering light. Regan waited at Estrian Valmaseda's side. That man was conscious now.

"Kheleil has taken the tribes away?"

"*Si, coronel.*"

"How far?"

"To the gully this side of the *ksar.*"

"How many men are with him?"

"We can count a couple hundred yet."

"And Marti?"

"Marti's all right, *coronel.* He asked me to come here and take care of you."

Pain had drawn the lines of Estrian Valmaseda's lips rigid, so that his smile was slow and brief. "This ticket hasn't got my number on it?" he said.

"Not quite, *coronel.*"

Slowly, as he ran a hand along the bandages, Estrian Valmaseda said, "You're too old a soldier to lie badly."

Regan turned his head. "Maybe it is the lung, *primo.* I don't know. This light isn't so good."

"*Buen'.*" Slowly, Estrian Valmaseda reared himself up against the wall, his hands outspread to bear his weight. His glance was across the compound. Three men were near the shattered portal of the gate. They walked with insecure strides, hefting baulks of timber and ripped chunks of stone. Juan Marti led them, constantly in movement and carrying twice the others' loads, forming the barricade himself. "I don't think," the old man said, "that you've given me all the news yet. Who's that man in the field cape, working with Marti?"

"I've got orders not to speak to you about that, *coronel.*"

"But Marti is building a barricade to defend this place. That man with him is from another outfit. He doesn't belong here."

"Listen, *primo,*" Regan said hoarsely, "Marti trusts me—and he trusts you now. But he's in one hell of a hurry. . . . That guy in the field cape is from a column cut of the post at Tougedra. He's a runner sent by the lieutenant in charge of the point scouting party. It seems a pair of guys from that bunch who went with Blasco yesterday noon got down the valley and free somehow. One of them made it into Tougedra. The *commandante* sent a column right out. We saw their flares, back there on the other mountain, about an hour ago. They should be in here by dawn. So all you've got to do is take it easy now."

"*Gracias, sargento.*" The lids were down over Estrian Valmaseda's eyes, the words so faint that the American could barely hear him. "You and I," he murmured, "can remember a lot of things, that have gone forever now. . . . I know; Marti did not lie, when he told me what has happened to Spain, and to the king. So it is easy to see why he did not believe me, knowing all I had lost by that, and will never have again unless the king returns.

"But Marti is wrong in one thing. As much as I loved my king, I love the Legion. The Legion has been really just about everything in my life. . . . Certain men drove the king from Spain while I was held a prisoner, thousands of miles away. I"—he gently smiled—"don't even know where the king is. But that does not count now, here. I am still a Spaniard, and a man who has served with the Legion. . . . You must help me up now, *sargento.* I must speak to your captain now. Because the dawn will be here soon."

Juan Marti could no longer bring his shoulders straight. The bandage on his

arm had worked loose and blood seeped through. He waited motionless, and as if calmly, before the ragged wall of the barricade while Estrian Valmaseda spoke. The old man stood with an arm on Regan's shoulder. From time to time, long, racking coughing held him, and there was bloody foam around his lips. But his voice continued on, spaced and clear:

"You think Moulay Kheleil will come back, *capitán?*"

"Listen to them out there," Juan Marti said. "They make no secret of it. Other men are coming down out of the hills to join them all the time."

"You believe they will come before dawn?"

"Before dawn, and before the column from Tougedra gets in here, *coronel.*" A grim kind of smile came to Juan Marti's face as he used that term of rank, and then, swiftly, he took a pace closer to Estrian Valmaseda. "But you shouldn't be here now," he said. "I'll have to ask you to get back over there. You did your job a couple of hours ago, at the rear wall. *Mil gracias,* for that, *coronel.* But this is other men's work."

"No," Estrian Valmaseda said rapidly. "There is no other place for me now but here. If only because I am a Spaniard and have been a Legionnaire. Because that barricade will not hold. . . . Moulay Kheleil has grenades; he can tear that to bits. Once he's done that, you haven't enough men to hold this place. Kheleil can only be waiting for one thing now—enough men to be sure he can hold this once he has got it. He will be able to keep this place, and you are not. I must tell you that. And you must understand it. For you must move, very quickly."

Juan Marti had let his stare become oblique, go to Regan's face, catch the American's slow, confirming nod. But then during several seconds more he stood in silence. "*Como?*" he asked. "How?"

ESTRIAN VALMASEDA gestured with his hand held stiff. His arm had dropped from the American's shoulder; he stood alone and upright. "Not here," he said. "But out in front. Before the wire. With mines—using all the explosives you have here, grenades and spare ammunition. You have no men to handle those here, but Moulay Kheleil has. He could arm a whole tribe with what he'd find here. He would be able to beat back the Tougedra column and take his tribesmen right on down to the sea. But he is hurried now, too, and you have men to work your machine guns and keep him back if he delays in getting through the gate. He must strike at the gate. He must come up that slope, from the gully. If you place your mine out there on the slope you'll catch him and his main force."

"*Dios!*" Juan Marti's eyes had lighted with a sudden flame. "But that's not possible, *señor.* No time; no men. All we have here to spare is a few cases of grenades and cartridges, a bunch or so of dynamite sticks. We've got no fuses, no detonators—and no time to run a powder train, or even bury the stuff. That can't be done now. The men—"

"Listen!" Estrian Valmaseda said. "Be quiet and listen to me! One man can do that job, once the explosives are taken out there. I shall do that; that will be for me. I think you have forgotten. . . . Several nights ago, when I came here, you spoke of the lands which were once mine in Spain, the place where both you and I come from.

"Your words then were that the king had given that place to my people, seen that we kept it. But before any king of Spain did that, we drove the Moors from there, swept them out, and into the sea. I do not know, but I think that in the years the Moors held me as a slave the memory of those things kept me alive. . . . I spoke of it one time, there in the mountains, the day Moulay

Kheleil sold me as a slave. He laughed at that, of course, and slapped me with his open hand, as he would slap a foolish child. Moulay Kheleil is still alive, and before I die it is still my hope that I can meet him. . . . That is all, *capitán.* The rest is for you, for the Legion."

Strangely, Juan Marti shook his head. "No," he said with a harsh vibrance, "you are of the Legion. That's what I haven't understood. . . . But I can't let you go out there now, *mi coronel.* Other men can do that. You—"

"You will try to stop me?"

Juan Marti's face had been drawn with weariness. Now, it slowly changed and warmed, and he smiled. His bruised hand rose in a salute.

"*El coronel* wishes?" he said.

But Estrian Valmaseda had already turned in motion towards the barricade.

"I want," Estrian Valmaseda said, "an automatic gun and a sack of grenades. You will come out with me and I shall show you where to place the mine. Then I wish to be bothered by no man. You understand me, *capitán?*"

"Fully," Juan Marti said. Then he wheeled and made a sign to Regan and the little group of men behind.

CHAPTER VI

SORTIE

MOULAY KHELEIL was the first of the Riffi up the slope. He came running quite erect, the hem of his *djellaba* tucked back from his knees inside his pistol belt. He carried a bayoneted Spanish rifle in his hands and a khaki sack of grenades slung at his shoulder. Regan marked him from the wall, and Juan Marti said at once, very quietly:

"Let him be. That's not for us now. Wait, and take care of the rest. But fire high, a couple of yards beyond the *primo.*"

Estrian Valmaseda lay more than a score of yards in front of the wire and the hastily placed, shallow depression in the soft earth which held the spread cases of grenades, cartridges and dynamite. Regan ranged his bursts along the further slopes, searched the gully edges and found the bunched groups of the clans. The bearded men sprawled kicking or went absolutely flat and came on prone against the ground. But Moulay Kheleil stood and yelled, one arm raised high, until several dozen of the tribesmen near him converged and formed in his direction. Then he went to the ground, down among the swaying tatters of the mist, bullets from the walls and Juan Marti's automatic piece striking all around him.

Then from below the first concerted volley of the tribesmen answered, lifting at the embrasures of the wall and the barricade. For a moment the post guns were almost silenced. Kheleil came to his knees, began another scurrying run with a big group of the tribesmen gathered solidly at his back. He led them by a space of several feet, pulling the pin from a grenade and drawing it back for his first throw at the barricade. Then he was in the edges of the snarled wire and a loop of it snagged his *djellaba* and held. Cursing, he heaved the grenade, looked down to free his robe and go on through the wire.

In that same instant Estrian Valmaseda came to his feet from the scooped hollow fifty feet away. He wavered as he stood, his head down against his chest. The pin of the grenade he held clicked sharply as he pulled it; the bomb hurtled softly bouncing along the ground when he flung it from him. Moulay Kheleil heard those sounds. He wheeled and saw the old man, understood. Scrambling, he jumped back, yelling out at the tribesmen to go prone, get away. He was out himself and rolling along the ground when the vomiting flame of the grenade lanced the entire mine alive.

Walls of flame whose cores were shat-

tering death leapt over the ground and into the air. Earth and fragments of metal fanned from the flame. Briefly, the tribesmen were held in silhouette, weird and terrible shadows of transfixed agony, then gone in whirling darkness.

At the barricade Juan Marti was knocked down and the gun flung in his grasp. Tongues of explosion twisted and jolted up still when he rose and vaulted the barricade, ran out. There were gaping, smoke-filled holes where the wire had been, and the bodies of the tribesmen who had nearly crawled clear. Below on the slope big groups of the others were huddling together, dulled and dismayed, if not yet afraid to advance further. They were silent. There was only one voice, that of Estrian Valmaseda calling Moulay Kheleil's name.

The old man strode erect along the slope, carrying the automatic gun he had asked for against his thigh. He did not answer when Juan Marti called to him. He did not seem to hear or understand the other's words. His glazed eyes turned at last as the younger man took him by the shoulder, made him halt.

"You will excuse me, *capitán,*" he muttered. "But you are not the man I want. Kheleil is still alive. He got away. . . . He is the man I must find. But you should bo back now. Listen. There are the bugles. The bugles of the Legion. . . *Gracias, capitán.* But there is this to be done—"

He walked on then, his shoulder sliding from Juan Marti's grip. He did not speak again, even when he heard the other's footsteps along the ground after him and swerved half way around. He just brought the muzzle of the automatic gun waist-high, and smiled gravely.

The Riffi rose to meet him when he had gone another few yards. They came up from the ground and the flaying bursts of fire from the walls which cut off their retreat, their rifles forgotten, pulling their short knives out from their belts. Oddly, they came forward to him one by one, man by man.

Estrian Valmaseda let them come very near before he started to kill them. They died straining out to get their hands on him and pull him down. Like that, he met Moulay Kheleil, nearly tripped over him. Moulay Kheleil was down upon the ground, his bloodied head and shoulders rearing up in just the last fraction of that moment. He had held his bayoneted Spanish rifle under him, raked with the point for Estrian Valmaseda's groin.

Very slowly, the old man relaxed his fingers from about the automatic gun. "Get up," he said in Spanish. "Stand up, Moor."

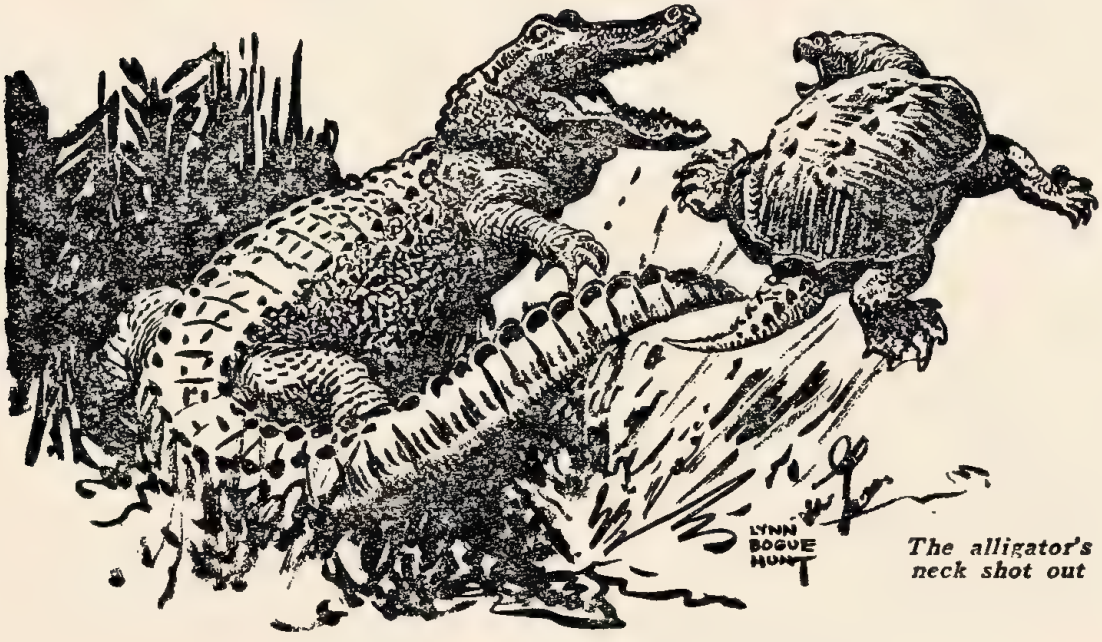
A kind of curse mixed with laughter lifted in Moulay Kheleil's throat. He started to rise, the rifle slanted out before his body. Then Estrian Valmaseda went at him, in past the bayonet, his hands cupping for the throat. Moulay Kheleil almost threw him clear once, wrenched loose to pull the curved knife in his belt. But the strength had gone from his hands and body then. His spine snapped and he fell back, dragging the other man heavily down with him.

Estrian Valmaseda was breathing yet when Juan Marti lifted him clear. He recognized Juan Marti and spoke, the words making a very thin thread of sound. "The bugles?" he said. "Where are the bugles?"

"At the gate now," Juan Marti said. "With the column. This is all over. You can hear them, *coronel?* You can see the Legion?"

"*Si, amigo.*" Estrian Valmaseda raised his head against the rigor of death holding him. "I can see. . . . That is all I have wanted, to be with the Legion, and to hear the bugles."

THE LONG DRY SPELL



The alligator's neck shot out

by PEGGY VON DER GOLTZ

CHELY was fishing. Her flabby, obese legs sprawled out. Mud settled in every coarse wrinkle along them. Her body was heavy and bloated and old. She was frowsy and unkempt; but her bright, small eyes were sharp and keen. She knew every nook and cranny, every submerged branch and water-smoothed stone in the pond. She knew each myopic catfish and every blundering sucker, for Chely had fished that pond for forty years.

She had grown old in the pond, and big, and ugly. She weighed a hundred and fifty pounds—a hundred and fifty pounds of heavy bone, and soft flesh, and oily fat, a hundred and fifty pounds of gluttony and meanness, a hundred and fifty pounds of determination behind each snap of her steel-sharp mandibles that could cut through a man's leg as easily as through a twig. She combined the cold wisdom of the ancient with the consciousness of power, for Chely was the biggest snapping turtle for miles around.

Algae grew thick on her back; and water lice crawled in and out of the plant growth. She looked like a rotting stump as she squatted in the mud. And under what might have been a rock a large white grub writhed slowly in an aimless circle. Fishes who had been born in the pond, who had known Chely all their lives, were deceived by the undulations of the fat white grub.

Chely watched a catfish nose a fragment of dead sucker. Her eyes brightened. She wasn't hungry, but if the catfish moved a little nearer she would surely eat him. In all her forty years food had never been so plentiful as now, nor fishing so easy. She was glutted with food but she'd find room. She sat tense, motionless. Under a tip-tilted rock a white grub writhed.

The catfish waggled toward her, still mouthing the sucker's bones. He saw the swaying worm, and never dreamed that it was bait in Chely's trap. His barbels wavered out ahead of him; his blunt tail heaved. The filament of white

flesh in Chely's mouth disappeared. Her head shot out, the quickest thing that moves under water. She ducked her head, and gulped. She ripped the bronze body with her clawed feet. The soft light flesh quivered as she swallowed it.

She poked her nose above the water's surface for air. Then she raised her whole broad head. It was odd to be able to squat in the mud at the bottom of the pond and lift her head above the water. And she was in one of the deepest spots, too.

Last year the water had been much deeper. Even this spring it had been as deep as usual. Chely could remember that when she left the pond to lay her eggs the spring rains were just stopping, and the water reached right up to that young willow tree. But by the time she had found a nice damp spot, and had dug a hole, had laid her round white hard eggs, and crawled out carefully so the earth would cover them, the water was beginning to recede. Since then the moon had grown big twice, and now it was waning for the third time, and not a drop of rain had fallen.

She looked across the brown surface of the puddle, six feet this way and eight feet that way with bare, dusty banks sloping up to the shriveled little willow tree. That was all that was left of her pond. Dead fish and decaying water plants drifted around the edge of the puddle. The air was foul with death. Chely floated to the surface, and still if she wanted to she could scrape bottom with her toenails.

Other turtle heads bobbed on the surface. Her mate was gaping contentedly a few feet away, and dozens of their children paddled aimlessly in tiny circles. They were all very fat, and growing enormously.

The sun was blistering hot. Chely slumped to the bottom and wallowed in the mud. But even the mud was hot. Chely didn't object to the heat—the hotter the day the hungrier she was—but she hadn't known the water quite so warm as this. And the scorching sun was drinking up the puddle very fast.

She rested in the mud until shadows fell across the water. When she raised her head a big bull frog tadpole was floundering at the surface, just in front of her. Swift as a rattlesnake's Chely's head shot out. She was barely able to submerge her head enough to swallow.

She paddled all around the puddle, scraping bottom with every movement, glowering savagely. Young snapping turtles skittered out of the way when they saw her coming. Her mate hissed an indifferent welcome. Then he turned away, and lunged into a tangled mass of fouling cabomba. However alluring Chely might be in the springtime, he plainly considered her a nuisance in mid-July.

THE sun went down, and a million stars shone low and clear and bright in the cloudless sky. The moon swung over the withered little willow tree. A faint miasma clouded the surface of the puddle, the only hint of moisture for miles around. And the wild things came down to drink.

Chely watched a rabbit with five scrawny youngsters lap the dirty water gratefully. A rice rat family guzzled noisily beside them. A black bear waddled down the path he had made for himself, setting each foot where he had set it yesterday in the dust-thick furrow that cut through the parched cane-brake. He drank with thirsty eagerness; but his bright, shrewd eyes were unsuspicious. A sleek young fox drank disdainfully from the other side of the puddle—like Chely he found the hunting easy when life was difficult for the vegetarians. Garter snakes were feasting on the frogs that crowded the margin of the water hole.

Chely sprawled in the mud, watching the silver sheen of moonlight on fur.

She thought she would like one of the little rabbits. She was very fond of warm, juicy meat; but the things that lived on land were hard to catch, and seldom came within her reach.

Inch by inch, so slowly that she seemed not to move, Chely crept toward the rabbit family. She might have been a moss covered rock, or an old stump. No silly rabbit would guess that she was dangerous. The rabbits were three feet away, two feet away, less than a foot away. Chely poised, taut, ready.

But the fox across the pond was as shrewd a hunter as she. He barked a shrill warning, and the rabbits scampered up the bank. The dry grass rustled behind them. The fox faded silently up the slope. The rice rats scuttled away in sullen fear.

Chely turned back to the puddle. A big catfish was flopping in the mud. Without any effort at concealment she waded through the ooze. Her long neck shot out. But a black, clawed paw was there before her, and her jaws snapped hard, empty. She turned, and her little eyes glittered with rage as she saw the black bear calmly chewing the catfish. He sat back on his haunches, and his toes curled in contentedly.

In cold, deliberate fury Chely snapped at the slack, placid toes. She felt her hooked mandibles cut through hair and flesh and bone.

With a startled grunt the bear dropped his catfish. He sat for an amazed moment unable to realize that his foot was being cut off. He whimpered once. Then with a snarling cry he lunged onto Chely's back, clawing at the thick carapace, wrenching at his foot.

Chely was raging now. Her fierce sharp beak cut deeper, deeper.

The bear grunted and snarled and slashed. But his claws slid off the dirt crusted shell. He rolled and tumbled, trying to overturn the turtle. But Chely's feet were braced in the mud, and her jaws tightened with grim fury.

The bear screamed in agony as half his foot tore off. Chely withdrew her head as the blood gushed, and the bear's hooked claws snagged under the edge of her carapace. Then a claw sliced through the fat of her leg, and another ripped her wrinkled neck. She struck again.

Panting, gasping, moaning, the bear slashed into Chely, though one foot was crippled, and now the web-footed devil had him by the flank. He gashed and hacked. His great hairy body heaved and strained.

Chely braced her legs and tugged. A hunk of living flesh fell from the bear's leg into the mud.

In a burst of anguished fury the bear gouged into the rough folds of Chely's suddenly indrawn neck. The coarse hide ripped. And for the first time in all her life Chely cowered. But she was ready to strike again when the bear turned and ran with limping, lumbering, shuffling haste up his path through the cane-brake. A red trail streaked behind him, drying quickly in the dust. His sobbing, moaning breaths made the night sad around him.

Chely lay still for a long time; then she snapped up a frog and went back to the mud to eat it.

THE sun rose, red and hot and thirsty, drinking the dregs of the pond. Chely saw that yesterday's swampy margin was a desert, that yesterday's trampled cabomba was fragile, withered straw. Bones of suckers and catfish bleached in the sun. Flies droned over the few moist scraps, and buzzed in maddening swarms about the wounds on Chely's neck and legs. The turtles huddled close together. Frogs piled on top of each other.

There was no longer water in the pond, just mud so hot and so shallow

that it baked in the wrinkles along Chely's legs, and stiffened in the spaces under the shell, where her neck and legs emerged. She could not possibly get her back wet. She couldn't submerge her head. She was so plastered with caked mud that she could scarcely move.

The last of the suckers had died, and the mud was littered with their bloated bodies. Catfish blew brown bubbles at the surface in a miserable effort to breathe. Snails were drying up. Rocks that had not seen the sun for years stuck up, bare and naked. Young turtles struggled helplessly in the mud. Older turtles ploughed through the black ooze, trying to stretch their mud-stiffened legs.

Chely slogged through the mud for a while. She tugged mightily at every step, and the mud squished reluctantly as her feet pulled free. Frogs tumbled into the tiny puddles she left behind. Walking was too great an effort, she decided. She settled down in the dampest spot she could find. Bubbles of marsh gas burst all around her. The sun burned through the dirt and dried algae on her back. It scorched through her inadequate dark shell. The fat on her flabby legs seemed to be blistering. She drew her legs in as close to her body as she could, hunched her head between her forelegs, and wrapped her long tail around her.

It seemed to Chely a terrible thing that she must sit there surrounded by food, yet unable to eat for lack of the little water she needed to submerge her head. She put all thought of food out of her mind. She tried to forget the heat. She settled into resignation.. But the flies still droned, and the sky was a white-hot furnace, and soon the mud was dust.

The night was very dark before the moon came up, although the stars twinkled dimly. No mist hung over the pond tonight. The wild things came, and looked, and went despairingly away. Chely watched the forlorn little shadows. She saw the rabbits come and sniff the dust. She saw the fox circle the dry crater that had been a pond. The bear did not come.

Chely heaved herself out of the dirt—there was no longer mud anywhere. Somehow she must find water.

The frogs were leaving. They leaped up the slope in long, desperate jumps. They were powdered with thick brown dust. Now and then one of them fell behind, choked by the dust, exhausted by lack of moisture. It struggled for a little while and died. The frogs were going in every direction. They seemed to have no special objective, just a frantic urge to get away. Chely decided that they were no help to her. She would have to decide for herself.

She started up the slope in a burst of energy that took her four or five steps before she realized that walking was very difficult indeed. During the weeks of feasting she had grown so fat that her legs could not lift the enormous body long at a time. The great gash the bear had clawed into her right hind leg was so plastered with blood and dirt that it cracked painfully at every movement. If only she could find a little water!

She dropped on her belly. But the fat oozed around her small plastron, pressed against her heart, choked her. She looked up at the willow tree—surely she could climb that far.

She stretched one foreleg, hooked the strong claws over a rock, braced her hind feet, and shoved. She fumbled for another rock. An inch at a time, gasping, her small sharp eyes glittering with rage, she hoisted herself up the bank.

She stopped under the willow tree. She was hot and dry and angry. She raised her head and felt the direction of the slight, dry breeze. She smelled for water, but the air seemed dry whichever way she sniffed. Then, very faintly, she thought she felt the hint of moisture. She crouched very still, and the night

air brought a whispering echo of what was, far away, a mighty bellow. That, Chely knew, came from the Big Swamp. All her life she had known about the Big Swamp, but she had had no wish to go there. The Big Swamp drooled along for miles before it squished by scarcely perceptible degrees into the water of the Gulf; and Chely disliked tide water. Also, the Swamp was full of alligators. Often in the spring she had heard the thundering love song of the old bull 'gators; and it had never pleased her.

But now she headed toward the Swamp, and struggled on. Weighed down by her own greed, and naturally adapted for traveling only under water, she found the going hard. Yet she pulled herself along from clod to stubble.

The moon came up. Toads and rabbits and field mice hunted or grazed all about her. She felt hungry, and she could have caught a few of them. But what good would it do to catch food she couldn't eat? She heaved herself on.

Her legs tired unbearably. But now she could rest, not comfortably, although she no longer choked so much, for the monstrous layers of fat were melting. She sprawled in a hollow where once a brook had burbled. Even now it was less arid than the brown meadows she had crossed. But Chely needed more than the green damp of a grass grown hollow. She needed water right up to her neck. She lumbered out of the ditch.

SHE clambered over hummocks and skirted holes, clawed into ant hills and deserted rabbit nests. Then, sharply, the fields ended, and a long wide ribbon, white in the moonlight, stretched east and west. She stopped and stared at it curiously. It couldn't be water. What was it?

Several feet away she saw another snapping turtle, about the size of her mate, crossing the smooth band of road. Farther down a rabbit loped across. It must be all right. Chely clawed herself onto the road, but stopped as two great eyes, brighter than the moon ever was, loomed over the brink of the hill, and rushed down at her. She slumped back and watched. The turtle down the road stopped too, and the car ran over him, jolting as it struck the heavy body. The spinning wheels passed close to Chely's face.

She hesitated for a long time. The turtle down the road lay still. She had heard his bones crunch. He would not move again. This flat stretch was undoubtedly dangerous; but on the other side of it alligators roared, and frogs croaked, and the smell of water was clean and nearer.

Clawing, slipping, sprawling on the smooth concrete she scurried over. Six hours ago she could not have lifted herself on so smooth a surface. But Chely had lost a lot of weight.

The moon went down, and the world was still and dark before the sun reared out of the east, and still Chely struggled on. The smell of water was a torment to her now.

The sun beat down with cruel fury on a parched and withered land. It sucked the last exhausted sap from the leaves and grasses. The saw grass was dry and brittle and newly vicious. Even the birds were still. It seemed to Chely that she was the only living thing in a sere, dead world. But she ploughed on, unmindful of the blasting heat, indifferent to the choking dust. The smell of water was the only thing that mattered. And she was getting nearer to it, nearer to the croaking alligators. But she began to feel pleased about the alligators, for she knew that when the 'gators croak during a long dry spell it is a sure sign of rain.

The day wore on, and late in the afternoon the air grew sultry, sullen. Dark clouds loomed in the west. The air was so heavy that breathing was

difficult. Even the alligators were silent. Only Chely moved in the awful, smothering heat.

Her path ran downhill now, and at last she noticed that a small hickory tree was moist, though its leaves hung limp in the heat. Farther on she passed witch hazel and sweet gum. The swamp was not far away.

The earth was damp now, soft and pleasant under her blistered, aching feet. Breathless with exhaustion and delight, she plunged down a little bank, into the blessed, muddy water of the Big Swamp.

She went under, into ecstatic oblivion, lay like a rock on the muddy bottom until she had to breathe. Then, slowly, languidly, she paddled up. She poked her snout above the surface and breathed the dank, sultry air. She was hanging slack, just breathing, when, suddenly, she was flung through the water, onto the bank.

Chely slung her long neck around, and her stubborn old heart thumped as she saw a head two feet long, armored, lipless, saw cold cat-pupiled eyes staring, and vicious, conical teeth, dozens of them, shining in the gaping maw.

In sudden ungainly haste Chely edged farther up the bank, watching the evil head just raised above the water, eyeing the beast's inadequate feet hopefully. Then she looked down the whole great length of armor plated reptile, ten feet from crunching teeth to lashing tail—four hundred pounds of alligator. There was no fear in Chely's heart, and little caution; but she was thinking now as she never had thought before. Alligators, she knew, ate turtles. And the old bull who roared in her face could swallow her in half a dozen gulps. But she had suffered hunger and thirst and the agony of long and dusty travel to get here. She needed water, and she needed food.

With the sizzling crash of doom the storm broke. A giant live oak, rent to the roots by lightning crashed down the bank. And Chely lunged into the water as the thunder crackled over her. And quick as the lightning that darted like the finger of death through the swamp, the alligator had her.

Chely thrashed the turgid water, opening her mouth in voiceless agony. She tried to swim ahead, but the alligator swam with her. She dived, and the alligator dived too. She whirled and twisted. And at last her heavy, scaled tail snapped off, close to the body.

She swung round, blood maddened, and slashed up at the 'gator's belly. Her jaws slipped on the heavy hide.

The 'gator's body bent like a war bow, and, as Chely snapped again, his tail shot forward, flinging her through the water, into the bulrushes, and with the same movement his head swung round to seize her.

But Chely's neck shot out. Her jaws clamped on a forefoot. The alligator crashed into the marsh, trying to scrape her off. He slung out into the swamp, straining his rigid head, but unable to reach her paddling feet. He reared half out of the water, and Chely smacked the surface with a sickening jolt. But she hung on with the tenacity of the damned.

Overhead the lightning flashed and the thunder rolled and the trees bent double in the gale, but Chely and the alligator fought on, indifferent to the storm, oblivious of its fury.

With a mighty heave of his tail the 'gator reared again, and Chely was flung across the water, with his foot tight clenched in her mouth. She dived, and dug into the mud with frenzied eagerness. She swallowed the foot. She rested a while. Then, swaggering a little though she was sore and battered, and she missed her tail, Chely paddled up for air.

She gulped deep breaths, then dived, peering from side to side, warily and yet curiously. A big alligator gar lunged through the water just ahead of her.

Chely stared. That was the biggest fish she had ever seen.

The gar hung for an instant near the bottom, and Chely had him. She bit into the long bony body with rapturous delight. She ducked her head and swallowed. She was so intent on food that she didn't see her enemy, didn't know that she was right beside his den, until half the gar was snapped out of her mouth.

Chely stared as the alligator reared beside her. She gawked at the monstrous length of belly. She saw that the mangled leg hung slack, tattered, still drooling blood. She watched the huge head rise above the surface to swallow. She drew her legs in, shot up like a lightning bolt, and bit into the exposed throat of the alligator. She felt the tough hide tear, and her jaws clamped with grim desperation.

The alligator crashed and thrashed. He lunged and darted. His tail churned the water into a whirlpool that slowly reddened with his own blood. He dived, dragging her through the bottom mud. He tried to rear, but her weight on his throat held him back. He went down again, scraping Chely against rocks and stumps. He whirled in a monster circle at the bottom, and all about him the brown water turned to red. But Chely held tight. And slowly the wide circle became a wavering loop, and slowly his fury slackened. And at last he rolled over, belly up, in the gore-mottled water.

When Chely came up for air the storm had passed, and a heavy rain was falling. She clambered onto a stump. Her flabby legs sprawled out as the clean water washed her back. Even Chely liked to be clean once in a while.

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OLD CATTLEMAN

by S. OMAR BARKER

"How will it be, Old Cattleman,
When barbed wire hems you round?"
"A fence can't keep the growin' grass
From sprouting through the ground!"

"How will it be, Old Cattleman,
How will it be, I wonder,
When keen plows cut the cattle trails
And turn the green sod under?"

The cowman's face turned westward then,
Toward far blue mountain haze:
"Beyond them hills lies still some range
That cows can kinder graze."

"How will it be, Old Cattleman,
If the crowders push you on,
And starving cattle bawl at night,
And death rides in the dawn?"

"The range is wide, my son," he said,
"But if dawn death must ride,
The tang of gunsmoke in the air
Will mark where *men* have died!

"Old cattle trails may blossom forth
With wheat and barley sown,
Yet somewhere cattle herds will graze,
And cowmen hold their own!"

"How will it be, Old Cattleman,
When your son's sons are men?
Will dwindling ranges cramp their souls?
How will it be by then?"

"I know but this, my son," he said,
His head up, firm with pride,
"That somewhere dust of herds will rise,
And saddle men will ride!

"For ours is the breed of the horseback men,
Born to the saddle's feel,
And over the cowman's camp at night
Ever the stars shall wheel."

"How will it be, Old Cattleman?
How will it be, I wonder?"
Down all the trails of time I heard
The answer of hoof-drummed thunder!

A Fool For A Boat

"You heard me. Get off my deck!"

by Richard Howells Watkins

YOUNG Captain Nicholas Redruth straightened his lean figure, thereby growing even leaner. His voice became more politely reserved.

"You misunderstand me, sir," he said to the owner of the schooner yacht. "It isn't my idea to trim you for salvage. My offer of assistance is friendly."

"Friendly!" repeated Hurlburt Wright. Like Redruth he was a tall man but, unlike Redruth, thickest through at the waist. His close-set eyes, red-rimmed from lack of sleep, peered with suspicion at this visitor who had come with the dawn.

Nick Redruth tapped with his restive finger a long nose, straight as a knife edge and nearly as keen. He did not intend to tell this pot-bellied yacht owner more than he could help. The truth was that the sight of the small blue schooner in such acute and humiliating distress wrung Redruth's secret heart. He had a feeling for little ships that other men wasted on horses or women. But he would not confide this to the gross lubber who had run *Starlight* aground in Current Gut.

How could Wright understand a thing like that? It would seem weakness, idiocy, to Wright. Nicholas Redruth might as well try to explain why he himself was a wanderer driven on and on over blue water by a fierce impatience with dull men and stupid jobs.

"Friendly!" muttered Wright again. He walked to the side and stared pointedly down at Captain Redruth's old rowboat and the two patched, soot-colored Virgin Islanders who were its crew. They were in strange contrast with their spruce, shaven young commander.

Redruth did not speak. His eyes were aloft, studying the fine straightness of the schooner's slender, tapering mainmast. Gaff-rigged on the fore and jib-headed on the main she was, as an able

cruising schooner should be, and her standing rigging was unrusting steel, light and strong. The dreams and sweat of good men had given her a soul of her own. No! That was fancy talk. They had made a ship.

Now her straining bow was slung high on a sandbar and her teak deck, slanting woefully to starboard, was dead under Nick's feet.

Not once in a man's life would he see a ship of quality and genius like this in the lesser West Indies. No, nor elsewhere, Redruth told himself. Yet here was *Starlight*—on the ground in a ticklish channel wide open to anything blowing up out of the southward. It was enough to make a man want to boot her miscalled master over his own rail, Nick reflected, eyeing Hurlburt Wright's rump with ill-suppressed savagery.

"Without pay?" Hurlburt Wright repeated. "You'd get me off without—"

A leathery seaman with a sagging, walrus mustache, not an old man but tropic-sapped, came up from below just then. He heard the words and echoed them with a forced roar of laughter, soured by an acid overtone. His rheumy, faded blue eyes gleamed maliciously at Captain Redruth.

"Him get you off, Mr. Wright?" he bellowed. "Him? That's good! That ain't the man to get you off. That's the one that got you on. The Gut's shoaled up near a fathom since this promising —haw!—young skipper ripped the bottom out o' his old tramp steamer across t'other end and plugged it up."

"What's that, Captain Purdy?" the yacht owner cried. "He did?" His reddened eyes blinked rapidly at the rigid figure of Captain Nick Redruth. "Is that so?" he demanded. "Is it?"

Captain Redruth had frozen up. Now he nodded casually. "The Gut has shoaled almost a fathom," he corroborated. "It's in 'Notices to Mariners.'"

The yachtsman whirled on Captain Purdy. "Why did he do a thing like that?" he demanded, as if Redruth were no longer present. "How could he get a steamship through this channel?"

Quietly Captain Redruth listened, a finger tapping his straight thin nose.

"He wasn't getting her through the channel," Purdy said. "He hit a rock on the edge of the main channel and the tide swept him across the Gut." He nodded his head vigorously. "Ask the underwriters," he added. "They know all about what happened. It cost 'em enough. The cap'n was insured; that's where you're different, Mr. Wright."

Two deep wrinkles on the yachtsman's red forehead ran down toward his closely linked eyes.

"So that's it!" he said harshly. "Wrecks his own ship, collects on her and then has the audacity to try some game with me!"

Captain Redruth leaned lightly against a quarterstay, waiting, unresentful.

"I've hired Captain Purdy on a 'no cure, no pay' basis to float this yacht," Wright snapped. "You get off my deck!" He pointed to the ladder.

In Captain Redruth stirred a peculiar objection to leaving *Starlight* in any mean retreat. For the opinion of the men he cared nothing. But for the schooner —she was more real to him that these two bellowing creatures. He leaned toward *Starlight's* master. "You know, Mr. Wright, my ears are troubling me," he said sadly. "I thought for a moment there that I heard you, a gentleman flying the burgee of a good club, order me off your deck for making an offer of assistance. I apologize for the mere thought."

Hurlburt Wright's jowls took on a rosier tinge.

"You heard me!" His voice shook with anger. "Get off my deck!"

A NEW thought struck him suddenly, as his eyes, noting some perturbation in Purdy's face, swept around the wild

and desolate walls of the Gut, fit scenery for any violence.

"If you've any idea that I'm helpless, Captain Redruth, forget it!" Wright rasped. "I know my rights—and I can protect myself."

He thrust a hand to his hip pocket, jerked out a new looking blue-black automatic and displayed it with grim significance. Then, sensing by Purdy's embarrassment and Redruth's look of polite incredulity that he had struck the wrong note, he started to replace it.

But Redruth's long arm flicked out and his fingers plucked the pistol from Wright's hand. It was done in a single movement, but the culminating wrench on Wright's wrist was strong and fast.

Redruth held the heavy weapon in his two hands, staring down at it curiously, completely ignoring both Wright and Purdy. Then, abruptly, he thrust the butt toward Wright and spoke to Purdy.

"It's a pistol," he said, as one communicating mildly interesting information.

Hurlburt Wright grasped at the gun and made haste to put it away. He glanced, not too directly, toward the bow, where two of his crew were fiddling with the windlass. They did not seem to note his beckoning gaze, but Captain Redruth did.

Redruth's thin face went white with a passion that did not change the set of his features. Uncertainly Wright turned to Purdy. So, too, did Nick Redruth.

"It has occurred to me, Captain Purdy, that perhaps Mr. Wright's attitude toward me may be caused by inferences drawn from your remarks about my late misfortune," Redruth said evenly. "If you wouldn't mind explaining—"

The salvage master shifted his feet on the teak deck as if it were hot.

Hurlburt Wright plucked up courage. "The consequences of—" he began.

"Consequences be blasted!" Nicholas Redruth's nostrils flared. "Never, sir, have I weighed future consequences against present justice. Speak your piece, Captain Purdy!"

Purdy massaged his hands in quiet misery. He had met Nick Redruth in this mood once before. He spoke:

"Cap'n Redruth's ship blew a boiler on her way into St. Matthew harbor. The steam went out of her. Cap'n Redruth let go his anchors but the wind and current had her. She dragged out of the fairway, holed herself amidships on a pinnacle rock and got sucked into the mouth o' the Gut, where she settled."

He would have stopped but Redruth's eyes were still inexorable.

"Cap'n Redruth, who owned a sixteenth in her, was exonerated at the hearing. The underwriters paid up without a fuss."

"And any slight animosity toward me that Mr. Wright has detected in your attitude might perhaps be due to what?"

"You bought the hulk back from the underwriters at a better price than I cared to pay and are stripping it yourself," Purdy replied sullenly.

"Thank you, Captain," Nick Redruth said affably. "I was sure you would never rest until you had cleared my reputation."

He confronted the glum yachtsman.

"And now, Mr. Wright, I'm afraid our friendship is shot, in spite of this explanation. But you may not disdain help from me after a bit more of Purdy. Your yacht is in a bad way, sir."

"I'd rather see her—" Wright choked off his words.

"If you should fail to float your fine schooner, Mr. Wright, I'd like a chance to bid on her. I'll offer you five thousand for her as she lies. Not much—but all I have left of my insurance money."

"She's worth ten times five thousand!"

Captain Redruth nodded assent.

"With water under her keel," he added. "But Captain Purdy's salvage tug draws too much to get near her and Captain Purdy's mind—forgive

my frankness, Captain—doesn't draw enough."

He waited for any correction, but none came.

"I must go," he said. "No; you must not urge me to stay, gentlemen. I have a job of my own."

At the rail he paused, his good humor apparently restored. "If you have need of any gear—wires, manila, snatchblocks or even dynamite——I'll be glad to let you have it," he offered and glanced at the scudding trade clouds. "It may save you a run to St. Matthew. Good luck!"

Lithely he descended to his shabby rowboat and sat somewhat stiffly in the sternsheets.

"Give way, men!" he said to his two Negroes. "Back to the ship!"

Slowly, somewhat splashily, they got the cumbersome old boat moving.

"Idiot!" Redruth condemned himself for his swaggering conduct. "But what a schooner!"

The oarsmen tugged against a sluggish current. The early morning light fell aslant the narrow rocky walls of this channel that separated the island of St. Matthew from its tiny satellite St. Jean. The wind, broken and twisted by the high land, blew hard in brief gusts.

Nick Redruth looked again at the sky and shook his head.

"A bit too rosy-fingered, this dawn," he murmured. "It might suit a poet but as a seaman I dislike it."

The boat rounded a bend. Redruth's face became a trifle bleak.

A hundred feet ahead the rusty, listing, half visible bulk of Captain Redruth's island steamer bridged the Gut like a dam, barring from it most of the water of St. Matthew's harbor. The doleful, unlucky end of a short bid for independence in a world of mass action! Two battered blades of the ship's propeller like flat, appealing hands, raised themselves in remonstrance to the higher rocks that gripped fast the stern of the hulk.

On the slanting fore deck, beside the vacant place where a winch had been bedded, Captain Redruth halted. He looked forward and aft along the stripped wreck.

"My command!" he murmured sardonically. "Keep your mind off that schooner, man, and get to work. There's money to be made out of this steel carcass. Money! Nickels, dimes, quarters, dollars! What's a schooner—even *Starlight*?"

LATER in that long day Nicholas Redruth strode in furious agility up and down the low edge of lava and volcanic rock that rounded off the northeast corner of St. Jean. Damned to inaction, he watched with agony slow men struggle unwillingly with lines, anchors and blocks to save the beautiful little schooner from the hold of the sand.

The top of the meager tide had been the zero hour for them and for the sorry-looking, stranded *Starlight*. But they had not made the most of that lift of the level of the sea. And there had been need, grave need, to get her off on that tide. Now, five hours later, they still labored, but labored with hope at as low ebb as the tide.

Blasphemously aware of that, Redruth stared to southward. The open sea stretched there, broadening out steadily in a rock-walled funnel. Current Gut was the narrow curving spout of this funnel. And the schooner lay helpless where the force of the seas, pouring in from southward, would be most strongly intensified by the converging walls of rock.

The trade wind, piping up, had hauled already from northeast to southeast.

"Damnation!" Redruth fretted. "If it veers to southward and blows harder the Angel Gabriel and nine steel hawsers couldn't save her. Work, you crawling fools!"

He swung his lean body around and paced the other way. "Fools?" he questioned. "Am I not the fool of fools to be racking myself about another man's craft—and he a sulky weakling? What's it to me?"

But he could not restrain himself from looking again at the mistreated schooner leaning over so helplessly and awaiting her doom while Purdy pottered. The sight of her brought a groan to Redruth's lips. She was above ownership, like moonlight on the sea. That fellow Wright, watching flustered white and colored men hauling hawsers and hoses over her deck, could not be her master.

Almost below Redruth, as close to the yacht as her deep draft would permit, was Purdy's black salvage tug—a squat, efficient looking craft to the casual glance, but a whited sepulchre to those who knew her. Her paint covered loose plates and shorn rivets; her boiler was a scandal; her equipment ponderous junk, her crew the scum of the beach and her captain a fumbling tinker who had thought purchase of her made him a salvage master. At the mercy of such as these was *Starlight.*

He had some power, had Captain Purdy, but the rocky shoulder of St. Jean and a reef with breaking water to westward prevented him from exerting a direct pull on the yacht. Bending that power around with snatchblocks and wire, to bring it to bear from astern of *Starlight*, where deeper water lay, was beyond Purdy. The anchors he laid out were dropped on bad snap judgment or dragged out of place like grapnels under the first strain of the hawsers. And his attempt to stir and sluice away the sand along the schooner's keel with hose lines had been half-hearted and doubtful.

"But that's not the worst of it!" Captain Redruth told himself savagely. "He despairs already and keeps looking to southward—to his tug's moorings and the rocks to leeward of him. He's thinking of the safety of his rusty sink. 'No cure—no pay!' He sees it's to be 'no pay.' The heart's gone out of the man—if ever there were a heart in him."

He glanced at his watch. Then, at a half trot, he headed westward over the ledges toward the hulk of his steamer. He boarded the half-stripped wreck and hurried across the slanting, bulging deck to the chartroom. His two idling blacks leaped to the dismantling of a cargo derrick but he ignored them. He flung a final glance at the hurrying clouds and thrust through the sagging door.

Quickly he snapped on the radio set that kept him in touch with the world and the weather. Leaden-hearted, he listened to the forecast. It was what he had feared.

"Increasing southeasterly winds shifting to south probably reaching gale force this afternon and to-night. Storm signals—"

For the stranded *Starlight* it was doom.

Nick Redruth stood still, looking down at his lean, restless fingers.

"She's not yours," he told himself. "Damn you, will you never learn sense? Not yours! Nothing to you—nothing at all!"

Swiftly he rushed out onto the deck and down the slant to the rail.

He stared hard at the water piling up against the plates of his stranded ship—the water of St. Matthew harbor that once went rushing down Current Gut in a torrent. Now some of it got past forward and aft. This was a mere trickle compared with the mighty flood that had given this narrow little strait its name. Only two thin walls of steel plates held back that head of water.

For a long sixty seconds Nick Redruth stared at this dam which once had been his vessel.

"The current would cut the sand out of the channel—and *Starlight's* square in the middle," he reckoned. "The water level would rise a good few inches in the flood."

He turned his eyes to the sagging deck

of the wreck. There was a lot of gear still on her and he had spent most of his meager insurance money in buying that hulk.

"I'd get enough money out of her steel bones to move on a long way to the next place," he told himself.

He took a turn up and down the deck. The old steamer was dead under his feet. There was no lift, no heave, no sense of aliveness such as a man could feel on a floating craft in even the stillest harbor. This ship was dead.

And *Starlight*, with her slim, towering mast, gleaming rigging and graceful sheer was dead, too. But *Starlight* would not rust and rot away through the long years; her destruction would be swifter and more dramatic.

"By dawn she'll be flotsam grinding up smaller and smaller against the rocks," he told himself. "And that slug Wright will watch—and he'll curse because he didn't have her insured—instead of mourning a beautiful thing gone out of the world."

He stopped, wheeled and ran back to his own cabin, abaft the chartroom. In there were stored many things needed by a wrecker to reduce a hulk to the metal scrap that men would buy from him.

He stared soberly at his supplies and then called his two islanders.

"It's a poor man indeed that can't afford to keep *Starlight* afloat," he muttered. "Even if it's just to look at her! Wright or no Wright, I'll do it!"

A LONG three hours later Captain Redruth, wet, bedraggled and sweating, pulled himself up out of the after 'tween decks of his ship. Wearily yet with care he reviewed his work below.

Near the ladder, the Virgin Islanders regarded him with edgy respect and shuffled a step toward the side of the ship.

"Into the boat!" Nick Redruth commanded, and they jumped to obey.

"You quixotic simpleton, you!" he raged at himself and followed. "A fool for a boat—that's you!"

Again the oarsmen rowed him along the winding channel to *Starlight*. The heavy bow of the boat splashed clumsily through chunky little waves. Near the grounded schooner these waves rose into seas, cresting briefly under the drive of the wind that now hit Captain Redruth in the face. He urged his men to greater speed.

It had shifted and strengthened; that wind, and it blew down the funnel of the two converging islands into the narrow Gut, as he had feared. The stern of *Starlight*, immovable as the rocks to leeward, still broke the charging assaults of the waves. But they were growing heavier and they never gave the little craft a respite. Redruth's eyelids came down and he surveyed the scene with slitted gaze.

Work in the boats of Purdy's salvage tug had stopped. Heavy gear had become hard and dangerous to handle in those leaping seas.

Redruth growled in his throat. "Why should Purdy strain himself on 'no cure, no pay'?" he muttered. What's the schooner to him?"

Captain Purdy and Hurlburt Wright stood together on the deck of *Starlight*. The speedboat was lying alongside, ready for instant use. The two men occasionally swung round to confront each other in their vigorous talk. The men of the crew waited with open hands.

As Redruth's rowboat bounced toward the schooner's side Wright saw it. He spoke suddenly, with turned head, to Captain Purdy. There was something surreptitious about the swift aversion of his face as he uttered those few words. Next instant he waved to Redruth to come alongside the ladder. It was an urgent gesture.

Nick Redruth swung up the schooner's side in a hurry.

"I can still get her off," he began.

But Hurlburt Wright brushed aside

the words in his eagerness to put forward his own speech.

"I've had a run-in with Purdy, Captain," he said. "He's quitting on me because I won't promise to pay whether he frees her or not. I'm sick of the whole business—although I'm sure you could get her off, Captain."

Redruth glanced past him at Purdy, who lingered at Wright's shoulder with a wooden face.

Hurlburt Wright's eyes slid irresistibly to windward, toward the making sea; then he tore them away.

"I'll sell her to you, Captain," he said. "She's a fine little ship and in no great danger, but I'm tired—"

"You haven't heard my plan," said Redruth with crisp justice.

Hurlburt Wright took his arm confidingly. "Never mind that, Captain, I'm sure you can get her off—a clever young man like you! I—"

A sea hit her. The ship under them shuddered; leaned a trifle further. Wright's fingers on Redruth's arm tightened convulsively; then he gulped down his Adam's apple; relaxed his grip somewhat belatedly.

"Five thousand, you said?" Wright asked. "Well, it's nothing—practically nothing—for a schooner like this but I'm a rich man, Captain Redruth, and able to gratify my whims. And I'm tired of her."

With tight lips Nick Redruth looked at him. Here was a temptation!

Hurlburt Wright misread his gaze.

"You're thinking of this little breeze out of the south!" he cried. "You needn't let that worry you, Captain. Purdy and I listened in on the weather broadcast earlier in the afternoon. 'Diminishing variable winds,' was the prediction. 'Diminishing variable winds.' "

Redruth's face froze up; his blue eyes glinted, bitter cold.

"Diminishing variable winds," he repeated. "That was the forecast, eh?"

"That was it!" Wright affirmed. "Purdy—you heard it, too, didn't you?"

Purdy nodded. "Sort o' unusual forecast—down here in the northeast trades, but that was it," he asserted huskily.

Nick Redruth nodded his head.

"Right!" he said stiffly. "I'll buy her with my last cent—on that weather forecast of yours."

Hurlburt Wright touched him approvingly on the shoulder and shot a triumphant grin behind a raised hand to Captain Purdy.

"You'll never regret it!" he cried with great heartiness.

"I won't!" Redruth's voice was curt. "The money's here in my wallet; I'll want a bill of sale and a note from Purdy that he has no claim against her."

"But — not now — with — " Again Wright eyed the rising sea, rioting in among the ledges and rocks along the side of the Gut.

"Now!" snapped Redruth. "We close now—or not at all."

He waited, looking aloft at the tall, trembling mainmast. Purdy took advantage of that preoccupation to nudge the yacht owner urgently.

Not too willingly Hurlburt Wright ventured down into her main cabin with the others following him. Below the ceaseless attack of the sea was far more evident; but Redruth paid no attention to her groanings. The sea was now plainly building up fast; the wind drew a dirge from the taut rigging.

When Redruth emerged from the cabin he was the penniless owner of *Starlight*. The spray was splashing high on her deck. Into the mahogany tender, not included in the bargain, Wright and Purdy descended, beckoning the crew to follow them. The men came on the jump after dragging ready-packed sea bags and valises from the forecastle.

As they jumped aboard Hurlburt Wright looked up at the schooner and at Redruth.

"You'll not own her long, Redruth!" he blazed in honest hate.

The motorboat surged away toward the salvage tug.

Only for a moment did Nicholas Redruth stand motionless on his own deck. Then he walked forward, made fast a manila line to one of the yacht's ninety pound anchors and called to his boatmen to lay it out ahead of the yacht. He gave it a hundred feet of scope and made his end fast around the windlass. He went below and started the motor. It was still hot from its fruitless use in the salvage operations. It turned over steadily when he left it idling out of gear. He hurried up on deck.

His rowboat was tossing restlessly. He dropped into it at once.

"To the steamer!" he commanded. "Give it all you've got! Make her jump!"

Willingly enough they bent their backs to get the rowboat into smoother water. But when they rounded the bend in the narrow channel Redruth kept them swinging the oars as strongly. Something of his furious impatience got into them.

"Pull!" he exhorted. "Together! Pull!"

Pull they did. The boat foamed alongside his hulk.

REDRUTH leaped out and up the side. He went below for a last look at his handiwork of the afternoon. In the after hold he picked up a coil of slender wire and a small box with a handle on the top. Unreeling the wire carefully he led it down into the rowboat.

The Virgin Islanders regarded the wire with saucer eyes, shifting uneasily on the thwarts.

"What you do, marster?" muttered one. He got no answer.

Redruth sat down in the stern and paid out wire as the two men rowed the boat across to the abrupt shore of St. Matthew.

"Walk back to town and wait for me there," he told them. "Get away from here!"

They scrambled out into the shallow water in a hurry, gaze still on the wire connecting wreck and rowboat. They ran up the shelving rocks like goats and disappeared over the brow.

Redruth, alone in the boat, pushed off and sat down on the rowing thwart. He rowed out into the Gut and then let the sluggish trickle of current carry him down in the direction of *Starlight.*

The wire slipped jerkily out over the stern, turn by turn. He watched it, bending to fasten the ends to the terminals on the battery box.

"Not a bad bargain—five thousand dollars for one chance out of many to save that little schooner," he reckoned softly. "Not bad—even with some small risk to my neck thrown in. You'll be a business man yet, Nick Redruth—if you live!"

The last few feet of wire were writhing out of the boat. He stood up over the battery box, looking toward the rusty old steamer. The oars trailed in the water.

The wire was almost taut. His grip on the plunger handle tightened. His lips thinned and smiled. Contact!

With a thunderous roar the rusted plates of Captain Redruth's old command bulged. They tore away in ragged sections from her decks. Instantly they vanished into the boiling water. Bits of iron sang past Redruth's ears.

Through and over the riven vanishing skeleton of the craft came water—a roaring wall of water that leaped and swirled higher and higher as the confining walls of the Gut flung it back on itself. It was the flood tide backing up in the harbor, come rushing to claim once more its channel. Its channel, and what else?

Redruth flung the battery box overside a moment after the explosion blared in his ears. Dropping to the thwart he caught up oars and began to row mightily down the Gut. His slender body swung the bending ash blades with the sure rhythm of a watch spring and the heavy boat surged ahead.

But that bore of water was not to be outstripped by a man in a boat. It

leaped along the crooked, rock-walled Gut like the thundering charge of a brigade of white-maned horses.

With every heave of his straining body Nick Redruth cut down the distance that separated him from *Starlight* —his schooner *Starlight*. Well he knew that he could not win that race. He had not hoped to win it. But he did beat the rushing water around the sharp bend that hid one stranded ship from the other.

Starlight was dead ahead now. Redruth knew that, though he could not turn his head, for the wall of water was close. Facing it, he dug in his oars and steadied the heavy boat, stern squarely to that torrent. His eyes fastened on the frothing wave and he waited to seize any slight chance that might offer.

None came. The flood hit. The solid mass of water flung the stern high. Then, mocking his utmost strength on the oars, it knocked the boat around and instantly rolled it over.

Redruth went with it, relaxing from knotted muscles to limp acquiescence. Under the rushing water his body was flung against the boat; then whirled away again.

He came to the surface behind the forefront of the rushing wall. It tossed him high, turned him over, submerged him, but always bore him on. The frenzied froth was smothering; like acid it stung throat and lungs when he tried to gulp at air. It was agonizing hell, that strangling, impalpable fluff.

But he swam with the hissing water when he could, with one strong purpose animating mind and body.

Burning, half blinded eyes peered desperately. Right ahead was the high, up-slanting bow of the stranded schooner. Nick Redruth flogged on toward it, fighting to keep pace, fighting to get air past the cutting salt foam that clogged his throat.

The torrent struck the yacht. Behind the flood was all the power of a Cape Horn greyback.

Like an affrighted thoroughbred the schooner reeled, bow soaring higher. No clutch of sand on keel could withstand the lift and thrust of that rush of water. The wave broke, roaring, about her bow, shooting spray up to the spreaders of her foremast.

The slack of the stout anchor line burned out through her bow chock as the schooner was carried backward. The rope rose taut out of the channel as the fluke of the anchor dug into the sand.

Nick Redruth spent what sinew and will was left in him in the next thirty seconds. He stroked with flailing arms toward that straining line. He clutched it and dragged his head above the smothering foam. He breathed, but the air was like stabbing knives to his lungs.

He looked about quickly.

THE schooner was afloat! She was dragging, checked but not stopped by the anchor, and fighting the tumultuous water that swept over her deck in erratic surges. She was assailed on all sides, for to the new current in the Gut was added the unceasing assault of the seas rolled up by the rising southerly. Astern of her, close and ever nearer, were the rocks and half tide ledges, thrashing solid seas into white spume.

Hand over hand Nick Redruth, coughing and gasping, pulled himself up toward her bow. Only scant seconds separated *Starlight* from destruction. Foot by foot, with hands like hooks, he climbed the slanting, strumming manila line. A pitch of the yacht flung him against her bow. He clutched the low rail, lifted himself chin high, darted out an arm and caught a hold inboard on the rope. Next instant he was on deck.

He pelted aft. The schooner was fighting valiantly to throw off the seas that raced across her planking and roared over her rail; her motion and the drag of water against his legs made his way precarious. But he plunged recklessly on.

The greatest menace was just astern. There, now only scant feet from her taffrail, great rocks, thundering, rose up through spouting, gushing white streams. Only the deep-digging, slow-dragging anchor had kept her off those macerating fangs so long.

Nick Redruth leaped at the engine controls in the cockpit. He thrust in the gears and opened wide the throttle of the idling motor. He felt the shudder of the yacht rather than heard the motor's quickening tone as it responded. But the propeller half the time was slashing through that hellish white froth that had no body; the schooner, with wind and sea pounding at it, still made sternway toward the granite.

Nick Redruth tightened his lips grimly. His fingers on the wheel were steady. Here was a little ship worth dying with. And it seemed that the sea gods had decreed her sacrifice.

He no longer looked astern, at the rocks. His back was to destruction. He looked forward, as the schooner pointed, toward safety and the open sea, as a man should look when peril may gather strength from the paralyzed stare of its intended victim.

All Nick Redruth could do he was doing, standing quietly by the wheel with the motor driving ahead. *Starlight* labored tremendously, fighting for life against that riotous sea.

The first fierce rush of water down the narrow Gut slackened with maddening slowness. It was that torrent, running so swiftly across the sea out of the southward, that had kicked up this chaotic welter.

Of a sudden Nick Redruth felt solid water under her—stuff that a propeller could grip. His eyes fastened upon the manila anchor line running out over her bow. The rope was not so taut. It slackened, sagged into the sea. He laughed aloud.

The schooner was gaining—going ahead! Redruth waited some fifty heartbeats to make sure. The rope was dropping under her. He looked astern. The breaking surf was some few feet from her counter.

He threw a lashing around the wheel. Then, with his heart in his mouth, he darted forward. It was a chance—one more chance—that he must take, leaving her to mind herself. With quick, sure hands he flung the manila line off the windlass and into the sea. Then he pelted aft again.

She had held her course, dead in the eye of the wind, with no hand on her wheel. It was as if she loved life and was fighting for it with him.

And now, slowly, pitching and lurching, she worked into the eye of the wind.

Straight to seaward, slashing the leaping waves, with the rocky walls opening out on either hand, she made her way. Proudly she reasserted her power over the element that had challenged her. Built to move under the drive of canvas rather than gasoline, her motor power was not great but her fine lines permitted her to slice through the rough water like a dolphin.

Nick Redruth's eyes glinted in fierce pride. Ahead, in the wallowing salvage tug, were two staring men who had lost this little schooner because they had feared to struggle for her on the brink of eternity. But Redruth never saw them.

She was his—his to fight for and to work for, to live for and to starve for—if need be. His! Or was he hers?

It did not matter. *Starlight!*

The second story of Redruth and his schooner *Starlight* will appear in the next issue.

In the blast of wind he couldn't get back.

PARACHUTE PERIL

by R. H. Wade

THE Hisso lengthened its roar and the silver ship curled up and over in the sky. It hung on its back a moment, then dropped and began to bore down toward earth, twisting gracefully.

I sat down on an oil can and watched. I noticed everyone else was watching, too. Sometimes a country crowd at a flying circus will eat and talk all day and only now and then look off the ground. Today they never looked down. It was Speed Pierce and his gang putting on the show, and people didn't look down when Speed Pierce was up.

Speed was the boy in that spinning ship. Wide eyes, riotous hair, he rode the winds for the thrill of it. Humdrum existence had no lure for him—hadn't had since that day two years ago when he packed up his bag, bowed sardonically at the dean, and walked from a college campus to stay. Something about driving a racing car around the cinder track during a football game. . . . He didn't explain many things. They just happened and he took them for granted. So did we.

Down and down his ship dropped, throwing wing over wing like some kind of a crazy ballet dancer. About one thousand feet up I saw the flippers straighten out and the rudder come center. That meant Speed had spun as far as he wanted to.

But the ship didn't quit spinning. It kept right on whipping around, and it kept right on dropping. The motor shot a ragged squirt of smoke out into the air and in a moment the noise of the firing reached us. Speed was gunning her out of the spin.

He blipped the motor again and then again. The ship didn't waver. It was closer now, and right over the middle of the field. The crowd stood silent, watching a beautiful thing in the sky and not knowing a young man was fighting for his life. The motor was roaring now, full out.

A young fellow crouched beside me on the ground. His chin was set and his eyes were wide with terror. He sat like one frozen and he didn't breathe. He was Speed's brother.

The silver ship was close to us now. Its motor was bellowing madly and we could see Speed's helmeted head jutting above the cowl. He throttled down the engine and then hurled it open again. He swung his controls to neutral and reversed them with the blip of his motor. He did all he could up there in the sky, and there on the ground we prayed.

He was down to six hundred feet now and I knew he was gone. His skill and a thundering motor hadn't been enough to lick a fluttering little silver airplane. And because of that he must die. His brother beside me had never taken his eyes from the machine. His lips moved but I couldn't hear the words.

At five hundred feet the ship bored straight for earth. At four hundred and fifty, perverse as a lady, she began to slow her whirl. At two fifty she dove straight down, engine wide open. Slowly and gently the nose lifted as the man in the cockpit nursed his stick. I held my breath then. Once I had been almost as close, and I knew how thick the whiskers looked on the old man with the scythe. The nose inched itself up, crawling from the ground as a man in a nightmare runs—runs madly and gets nowhere.

It looked almost as if the ship and ground had met, so close were they, when, under Speed's gentle urging, the silver streak came level and flashed across the field. I drew my first breath since Speed gunned his motor and looked at the man by my side.

He was young—two year's Speed's senior, I judged—and he was shaking like a leaf. Great beads of sweat stood on his face and when he passed his hand across his brow it came away wet, as if he had dipped it in water. When he stood up he trembled and his legs would not support him. He grasped the oil barrel and waited silently until his muscles came back under command. Then he walked across the field.

Above us, Speed regained altitude. He came directly over the field again and began to stunt. He looped until his machine looked like a continuous circle; he rolled from one end of the field to the other; he did wingovers and split-air turns and slow rolls. He flew on his back and he skated. Then he curved gracefully around the field, tipped his ship up on her side, and slipped almost vertically down. Smoothly he brought her level, smoothly and dramatically he fishtailed to kill his speed, smoothly and perfectly he touched her wheels and tail to earth.

The crowd surged forward and stood murmuring around the airplane. Speed, who was tall and lean and built like a steel spring, smiled a wide grin and hauled off his helmet. A shock of brown hair stood on end and he ran his fingers through it like a comb. Then he put a foot on the cowling and vaulted to earth.

His brother stood silent, watching him. Speed gave him a glance and snapped, "Don't look so much like a little girl getting scared in the dark. I'm no ghost."

"You know how close you came to being one, don't you?" replied his brother. His voice was flat and lifeless. It completed the biological paradox. Speed's words were crisp and clear. When he was angry his voice cracked like a whip. He shrugged his shoulders and grimaced.

"Nuts," he said. "Every good pilot has to trim the old boy's whiskers once or twice. It's good for him." His tones became sharper. "It would be good for

you, fellow—if you know what I mean!" The tension was unmistakable. I was uncomfortable. Always it was like this, and I hated family rows.

SPEED strode away from the ship, heedless of the crowd. His brother kept pace.

"Listen, Speed," he urged. "Why don't you quit this stuff. It's going to kill you someday. It isn't worth it. You have plenty of chances to do other things. Shop work, business, even exploring. Engineering, if you'd go back to school for a little while. Let's give this wild-eyed flying circus a kick in the pants and get into something sane."

Speed halted and swung around.

"Listen, Walter! This 'we' stuff won't get you anywhere. We haven't anything in common and never have had. You may be hot stuff some places, but out here you're not. You're yellow, and you know it. You haven't a manly quality in you anywhere. The things we do—you can't do. You've had your chances and you've turned them down. You won't even try to fly, won't even get off the ground."

The flying man towered above his brother, snarling his words downward.

"You're yellow and I'm sorry I have to know it. I'm sorry the rest of the outfit has to know it. You're my brother, but you don't know what a man gets from this sort of work. What he gets in the thought he is doing something a guy like you can't do. I wouldn't quit it for a million dollars. It may quit me some day, but it'll be worth it. At least I won't be dependent on someone else for my food."

Speed was biting his words out viciously. The tension of his narrow escape a few minutes before released itself in his rage.

"You can quit the show any time you want to. Any time you want to starve, that is. We won't miss you. We can hire plenty of mugs to drive a truck and collect tickets. You're no help here. The things we need, you won't do. We need a stunt man. We need a man to walk on wings and jump in a parachute. You're afraid to. So the rest of us—the guys who do all the flying that makes our livings—we have to do the rest of it too. Stop carrying passengers and put on a show so the customers won't go away. So they won't quit riding and paying money—"

Speed turned and went on toward the truck and tent. He didn't look back and his head was held high. I looked at Walter a moment in half-pity. Speed was right, of course, from our point of view; no doubt about that. Walter was a coward. He refused to get inside of an airplane. And, what's more, he frankly admitted that he was afraid.

Now Walter turned to me. "You heard him. You heard what Speed said to me. I nodded. Everybody had heard it. Speed didn't throttle down his voice when he got mad.

Walter began to walk beside me. I'm thirty years old and that makes me a papa to everyone else in the outfit. I felt rather sorry for Walter, though. It's easier to be philosophical about yellowness in another man's brother than in your own. It was a bitter dose for Speed. I knew—the wildest pilot who ever ran his wheels down a country road. Actually, when we would come to a place where a flying friend was buried, Speed would take his ship over the cemetery and do the stunt that had killed the other fellow. If it was a loop, he would loop. A spin, he spun. Sore of a gesture of defiance.

"I don't know what to do," Walter was saying. "I can't help it. It's true—what he says."

For lack of any other idea, I began to reason with him. "Why don't you snap out of it? Why don't you take a ride, a real ride? Let me take you up and give you the works. Show Speed you can do it."

But he cried out stubbornly, "No!"

I was disgusted. "Okay," I said brisk-

ly. I began to whistle and went over to help bed down the ships.

The show continued on through the Middle West as usual after that. Walter drove the truck to new towns and we would bring in the ships a day later. Hand bills would have been gotten out and Walter would have a choice of fields for us to use. Our shows were popular and usually the same. We would advertise a sensational parachute jump for five o'clock and stunts for all afternoon. The three ships in the show would haul passengers and we would take turnabout in doing the program. One fellow would do loops and later on another one would do some rolls and spins. We kept the stuff scattered through the day to keep interest up. After the parachute jump, of course, everybody folded up his blanket and went home. The jump was what they came to see.

Hartsville, Missouri, was a Sunday show for us. Sunday was our best day and we tried to hit the bigger towns then. Folks would come out early in the morning and park their cars. Sometimes they would feed us. We made a bigger profit when they did. That's how close our budget was figured.

The Sunday in Hartsville was warm and cloudy and there was just enough breeze to make our take-offs smooth. I appreciated that because the rain of the day before had worried me. All our ships and equipment had been soaked and we had spent most of the morning tuning up our motors. But the field was not muddy, just properly soft, and it looked as if the rain might hold off all afternoon.

By one o'clock the whole town was out on our field. I must have booted a thousand kids off my ship. One wanted to ride back on the tail. It would be cooler there, he said. Walter heard him say it and his eyes bulged out like marbles. Then he saw me looking at him and he got red and went to yell out his tickets for the bargain rides.

Speed was dressed in his usual outfit of snappy breeches and leather jacket. He was good looking and he knew it. Also, he knew a snappy-looking pilot attracted the cash customers.

I elected to do the rolls and spins that day. My ship had never whimpered in a stunt and I figured that Speed might as well lay off the fancy stuff until a rigger went over his crate. Speed said he would do some loops and then make the chute jump.

The other ship—Charley Mitchell's—was a slow tub and was used only for passenger hauling. It held five and was really the money-maker of the outfit. Also, Charley wasn't so hot about stunting. He had been in a couple of bad smashes and they had made a cautious man of him.

It was a good afternoon, despite the clouds. I hauled passengers until my arm was tired from picking her up and setting her down. Boys and girls who tried to spoon until I gave them a couple of ups-and-downs; women showing their husbands who was boss; kids with big eyes; folks trying to get a thrill.

They were all okay by me, though, and they meant money in the bank. The old ship had never flown better and the field was perfect. Speed never stopped all afternoon. He got most of the young crowd, of course, and all the wives who wanted to ride with someone who had a little more zip than hubby had.

My own little show went off like a firecracker. I hung her over on her side and then began to roll like a top. Once in a while she would sort of whimper as I gave an extra good twist, but nothing happened. My spin was neat and smooth and, what's more important, stopped when I told it to.

UP until five o'clock there hadn't been a thing to furrow a man's brow. But at five it began to rain, heavily. That was the scheduled time for our parachute jump, and the customers were calling for it. I told Speed we might

as well call it off and let 'em yell. I couldn't see much sense in dangling down through the rain. But the crowd didn't seem to be moving at all and Speed said he'd give 'em what they came for. It was his circus and it was using his name and there wasn't going to be any short-change in the entertainment.

We had an exhibition chute, all colored up like a Roman candle, and it made a big splash in the sky when it came down. The pack was like a big sack and was fastened, mouth forward, to the undercarriage. The jumper crawled out on the wing, hooked himself into his harness, and let go. A small rope would release the mouth of the bag and the chute would be yanked out. Simple enough, and gaudy, but not much like the seat packs of today.

I fixed her out on the left side and we took off. The rain was slanting down in sheets as we ambled down the field, squirting water from under our tires, and got into the air. The crowd, wet as the grass itself, sat tight and waited for the big thrill. I grunted in annoyance and began to climb. Jumping a man never was my idea of a good time. I remember once, down in Texas . . . but that's another yarn.

Anyway I envied a bird like Speed for his nerves of ice and his ability to look death in the face, wink and then spit at him. I used to be that way myself, but not any more. . . .

We got up to three thousand feet and began cruising across the field. The rain poured into my cockpit by the bucketful. I hoped it wouldn't get into the engine too much.

Speed climbed out on the wing and made his way down to the landing gear. He hooked his harness and waved to me. Then he grinned and thumbed his nose at the mob below and jumped. I felt a jerk as his harness came taut but I didn't see the chute bloom out in the rain below me. Lifting myself up, I looked down and saw Speed dangling there in the air, a few feet below the ship, at the end of a small rope.

Immediately I understood what had happened. Wet weather had dampened everything and the ropes holding the mouth of the chute pack had shrunk. They would not let the parachute go.

Speed looked up and inspected the bag. Then he began to try and lift himself back to the undercarriage. But in the blast of the wind he couldn't make it. Three times he tried and each time, when his fingers almost touched the axle, he had to drop back. I was paralyzed. There was nothing I could do. I had to stay in the ship and fly; and if I tried to land Speed would be torn to pieces.

I dropped the nose gently and circled down over the field. Then I straightened out and flew across the crowd. They were seeing a real show this time, all right. Charley Mitchell stood beside his ship and looked up. He waved to indicate that he understood the trouble. But what could he do? Speed couldn't lift himself up and I couldn't help him. Charley Mitchell couldn't get to us.

Then I saw Mitchell's ship begin to roll off the field and climb. I watched him come level with mine and begin to edge in. Charley's face looked over the rim of his cockpit, round and red and horror-struck. He looked carefully at Speed and then motioned for me to shut down my engine. He throttled his and we glided side by side. I could hear Speed's voice.

"Bring up a knife, Charley," he yelled. "If you can toss it to me I can cut the rope and get the chute free."

Charley nodded and dived for the field. I picked up again and cruised aimlessly back and forth. When I glanced at my gas indicator my heart actually stopped beating. There wasn't enough left for a half hour in the air.

Then Charley was up again. He swung in front of my ship and held his hand up. It clutched a large pocket knife. Carefully I slowed my ship down and carefully Charley watched his distance.

Then he threw. The steel flashed through space toward Speed's hand. I held my breath. And the knife missed. It missed by inches and I watched it tumble to earth, glinting as it rolled over and over. Charley sat in his ship and looked at Speed. It was all he could do. He was so close I could see the details of his face. I know I saw tears mixing with the rain.

Again Speed tried to lift himself up on the rope and once again he slipped down.

When I looked up again Charley was gone. His ship already was dropping over the fence for a landing. I envied him. At least he wouldn't have to feel that he had killed his best friend. I wouldn't feel that way either. If Speed went, then I went. I would hang her up on one wing and we would both smash up together. It was the only way out.

Then I saw Charley's ship rumble up again. Fascinated, I watched. Charley's ship came roaring up in a long circling climb. In the front cockpit was another figure. It was Walter.

Charley swung his ship in close to mine and I saw Walter's face. It was white, the dead white of a corpse. No hint of feeling showed in his features and he didn't look down at the ground. His eyes were fastened to the figure swinging below my machine.

I saw Charley's prop slow down, saw him motion to me. I glided and heard him yell. "Walter's coming over. He's going down and give Speed a lift to the undercarriage."

Dumbly I nodded. I didn't dare to think. All I could see was Walter, his face frozen with terror, climbing from the cockpit, walking on the wing. From a near-trance I saw him stand on the cowling behind the engine and put his hands on the centersection. Slowly he leaned forward and flattened his body against the wing.

The wind howled and bit at him and the rain must have been torture. He was shoved mercilessly against the sharp leading edge of the wing. Slowly he lifted one knee to the top wing and drew himself up. Then he lifted his other leg and stood there on his knees—on his knees on the top wing of an airplane three thousand feet above earth.

ON his hands and knees, his left hand clutching desperately at the front of the wing, his other palm flat against the fabric, bracing himself against that torrent of force which sought to hurl him backwards into space, he inched along the wing. I saw the ailerons go down slowly as the wing became heavy. I saw him near the end of the wing and pause. Then, as the two machines roared along side by side, he stood erect. And never have I seen such utter misery written on a man's face. It covered him like a mask, his fear. It was the picture of a man who didn't dare move an inch —and who did.

There was no rope to brace Walter, no stirrups for his feet on the slick fabric. Charley let his ship fall back and down below mine. Then he crept up. Gradually his right wing neared my left one. It floated steadily closer. And slowly Walter lifted his arms.

Then the two wings were together, one directly above the other. Walter's hands reached out and clawed at the smooth, treacherous fabric. One hand found its way into the slotted grip at the end of the wing. His knuckles showed white as he clenched his fist. His head appeared even with the wing and then a little higher. Leaning forward on his chest, his legs dangling into space, he wrenched one hand loose and flung it forward at the strut. His arm drew his body forward and he lay extended on the wing, gasping.

I shouted, "Good boy," but he didn't hear me. His teeth were clamped tight and his eyes stared straight ahead. After a moment he eased himself forward on the wing and began his crawl to the center. The gasoline gauge trembled toward the fatal mark. I trembled too.

and I'm not ashamed to admit it. I had three lives to guard now.

Walter lowered himself down over the front edge of the wing and onto the undercarriage. I flew so smoothly the old can might have been skating on ice. And I hardly knew what I was doing.

Speed looked up, sighting along the little rope that could kill him as surely as a hangman's noose could. Walter grabbed the line and pulled. Speed rose slowly until his fingers could almost clutch the axle. Then Walter's strength failed. He was worn out, done for. He sat there silently, expressionless, looking at the rope and at Speed.

I heard Speed call, "Let down your foot." Walter sat astride the axle and hooked one foot in the bracing wires. The other he lowered toward his brother. Speed hoisted himself on the rope and grasped the toe of the shoe between his teeth. Hanging thus, by the strength of his jaws, he lifted his arms again to the rope and gave a powerful tug. Walter slipped a hand under his arm and aided. And Speed came up to the axle.

Walter didn't even look at Speed. Neither one made any move to come to the cockpit, so I dropped rapidly toward the field. Both men stayed on the axle until I landed. They couldn't have climbed another inch.

Charley was waiting for us when we rolled up. I went over to talk to him. It seemed to me that the brothers Pierce might have something to discuss in private. I did see, however, that when Walter stepped from the undercarriage his knees buckled below him and he had to sit down. I could see him tremble from where I stood.

"It was the darnedest thing I ever saw," Charley told me. "This boy Walter saw Speed on the rope up there and he looked like he was going mad. 'Do something! Do something!' He yelled it over and over. I told him there wasn't anything to do, but he didn't even hear me. Just kept looking up there and saying for somebody to do something.

"After I came down from that first trip, he asked me what I had done. I said I hadn't done anything, that I was going to try to get a knife over, but that it was hopeless unless someone went over there and helped Speed climb back up.

"When I landed the second time, he was standing beside the ship. Before I got out of the seat he began to talk. Just chattered away, like he didn't know what he was saying. He said, "I've got to do something" over and over again.

"It sort of got me. I thought he might have gone insane. But he climbed in the front cockpit and never said a word. Just waited for me to take off. I did. You know the rest!"

Charley muttered to himself and told the story over and over again. But I was more interested then in watching Speed and Walter. They walked toward us. Walter's face was flushed, I saw, but not as red as Speed's.

Speed called us over.

"Listen, you guys," he said. "I've got something to say to Walt here (he'd never called him Walt before) that you've got to hear."

He stopped. It looked as if Speed had run out of words when he turned to his brother.

"You saved my life today. We're brothers. What do you want me to do? Quit flying?"

Walter fingered his shirt collar. "What time is it?" he asked. Automatically I told him. Six o'clock. "It's an hour yet until dark, isn't it?"

Speed nodded.

"Okay," said Walter. "Let's get going."

Speed stared. "Get going? Get going where?"

Walter glanced at the ship he had just left and swallowed hard. Then he squared his jaw.

"Up!" he said. "I—I want to learn to fly."

And Charley Mitchell and I went off to hunt some liquor that rainy afternoon in Hartsville.

THE CAMP-FIRE

where readers, writers and adventurers meet.

WITH "The Hawk of Zaguamon" (writes Arthur O. Friel), ends the tropical adventuring of Steele, Northern business man whom you met in "The Raiders." Whether or not this is also the finish of Torre I can't say just now. As indicated in connection with the preceding tale of his doings, the real Halcón is—so far as I know—still riding the Venezuelan plains and rivers. And nobody—including me—knows what he may do next.

For this and other reasons I've somewhat disguised his real name and movements. The State of Zaguamon, for instance, is my own invention, made from the names of three real *llanos* States: *Zamora, Guárico, Monagas.* As for Aragua, there are two or three towns by this name. And as for Governor Boves—if there is at present an official so named, I don't know him and this tale does not apply to him. A long time ago there was a Boves, not merely a governor but temporary ruler of all Venezuela, whose merciless murders and other cruelties maddened people into successful revolution.

But, returning to Torre, his method of fighting with a small but hand-picked force of followers—hard guys who can "take it" without a yelp—is truth. So is his derisive trick of taunting Gomez for his own purposes. He is, or was, a quite capable telegrapher, having learned the ticktick language in order to intercept government news. Many a time he has tapped an overland wire, learned facts vitally important to him, and then sent a mocking message of his own. More than once he has quixotically warned some town or other that he would raid it the next day—and kept his word. At other times he has either wired or written to Caracas, describing his latest ex-

ploits, plaintively asking why the army doesn't come and get him, and so on. Crazy as a coot—maybe. Or maybe not. There's such a thing as wearing out your antagonist's nerves and getting him in the end. Also, a powerful weapon is ridicule.

Speaking of weapons, let me save some genial sharpshooter the trouble of informing me that the Mauser cartridge is not .30. I'm quite aware that the regulation German cartridge is called 8x57 mm., equivalent to caliber .315. My information is, however, that the actual caliber is 7.65 mm., which is our .30. Moreover, *Mauser-Werke* (or *Waffenfabrik Mauser*) turns out plenty of rifles chambered specially for the American .30 Government '06 cartridge, which, because of the comparative ease of obtaining ammunition from us, would be the logical choice of Boves. And the difference in sound and effect between .30 and .315 would be imperceptible either to listening ears or to drilled tissues. However, enough! And, as usual, best of luck to you all!

RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS goes to the West Indies whenever he has the chance. His liking for them is shared by a liking for ships, and for a long time he has speculated on the chances a man would have trying to make his living among the islands with his own schooner. He is trying it out in fiction. The first story, in this issue, tells how Watkins (or his story-character) gets the schooner; and in the second yarn, which will appear next month, he sets out by hook or crook to make a living with it. Watkins says this of his subject:

As long as there are breezes there will be sailing ships. And I like to think that where the winds are strongest and steadiest there sailing ships will always be used as something more than mere pleasure craft.

Certainly wind ships will long be needed in the West Indies and particularly among the smaller islands such as the Virgins, the Windward and Leeward groups, Curacao and others south of the Greater Antilles.

Yes, the West Indies have regular steamship services and a few cargo boats ploughing the deep indigo depths among them. Fast American planes go storming through the blue sky and puffy clouds above them. They're modern. But they are also ancient. They have the northeast trade wind and the trade is free, cheap and a lot more regular than any man-made service. The islands are many and small. The complexities of inter-island traffic would easily bankrupt the strongest outfit that ventured to tackle it. The schooners and sloops will have a job for many a year yet.

You can see them lining the waterfront at San Juan, Porto Rico, anchored out in Pointe a Pitre harbor, Guadeloupe, lying alongside the wharves inside the pontoon bridge at Willemstad, Curacao, or in almost any roadstead or bay among the islands where a bit of cargo or a few passengers can be picked up. Mostly it is prosaic work, no doubt, but a schooner under sail is enough to rouse the most sluggish imagination in these waters where galleons of Spain once fled the nondescript ships of buccaneers and the fleets of Europe met in sanguinary battle.

The West Indies themselves will never be tame. Not while hurricanes, breeding in the doldrums, bear down upon them, not while arched squalls, sudden as the lightning that darts from them, sweep their channels and passages. Not while Mont Pelee smokes and rumbles, and snakes need bite only once and the mysterious rollers from a calm sea batter the coasts without warning or reason.

Surely, if ever there was a place where adventure might take refuge in this modern world, where a man with a schooner might try to cope with nature and his fellow man without resort to dull commerce to supply his grub and cordage, it would be in this Caribbean sea among the islands of many nations and the tropic-chained people of every race. That is what Nick Redruth, rebel against monotony, is trying to do. To him a beautiful ship is home, church and country.

IN the parachute story by R. H. Wade the trouble is caused by one of the older style 'chutes—before the seat pack was invented. Wade explains about that in the following note. He is not himself a pilot nor a jumper, but he was connected with Art Goebel's flying school in

Kansas City until it closed. There he did a lot of riding and observing, and met many men of the breed who regard a plane as made for stunts as well as for going places.

An old profcssional jumper, who has stepped off more than 150 times, gives this parachute information:

There were two types of early exhibition 'chutes—the Thompson and the Harding. The Thompson parachute was a canvas bag containing the 'chute. The silk itself was restrained in the bag by an elastic web around the bag's mouth. When the jumper attached his harness and dropped from the plane, his weight forced the silk out through the elastic mouth.

The Harding 'chute is the one considered in the story. It too was a canvas bag, but its mouth was closed by lacing which was caught into a bow knot. The jumper climbed to where the 'chute was attached—below the lower axle of the plane or out on one wing, attached the harness lines of the parachute to the harness connections worn on his person, and dropped himself down to the end of the harness. He then "ripped" the mouth of the bag by pulling the rope and untying the bow knot. His weight, as in the other 'chute, then pulled the silk from the bag. If the jumper could not pull the bow knot free with his rope, he was helpless, because he hung below the parachute which placed him too far below the ship to grasp anything. The 'chute could foul through the lines shrinking, as a shoe lace will shrink, until the jumper could not release the knot, or it could foul by one end of the knot whipping through a knot loop—also as a shoe lace will sometimes do—and becoming a hard knot when the rope is pulled. If the jumper could use a knife he could cut the rope and allow the 'chute to pull free. If he couldn't cut the rope, he was "stuck."

TWO letters follow about the HS-2L seaplane, which was up for Camp-Fire discussion some time ago. Lieut. Commander Vernon C. Bixby, *Ask Adventure* expert on navy matters, tells us:

I noted a question about the HS-2L seaplane. Possibly the following information would be acceptable.

Before we entered the war Curtiss designed a seaplane for John Wanamaker who had expected to use it on a trans-Atlantic flight. Curtiss called it the HS type and it was equipped with his own motors. When we entered the war, the Navy Department used this design as the best available but increased the wing span. This was called the HS-2. Later when the Liberty engine came into production, the letter L was added to its designation to indicate Liberty engine. It was not until after the war that the use of letters and numeral was standardized.

FRANK COUCH, of Seattle, Washington, gives us another angle—why they called them "flying bathtubs."

Back in the early twenties, twenty-two, three and four, to be exact, I was the operations clerk at Camp Nichols, Rizal, P. I. This island air base is now known as Nichols Field and is located about five kilometers south of Manila.

Approximately a mile from Nichols was the tiny flying field on Paranaque Beach. There were several large, corrugated iron hangars there which sheltered both HS-2L's and the flying boxcars, two F5L's.

Very shortly after my arrival in the islands, the HS-2L's were flown to Kindly Field. This field, located on the island of Corregidor, a monstrous rock and steel fortress blocking entrance to Manila Bay, was little more than a patch of rocks, hazardous to the *nth* degree.

So the 2nd Observation Squadron received these HS-2L's and hangared them in sheds down on the beach. I have never heard of any other army air service unit carrying out all their maneuvers with seaplanes, or as we called them, flying boats.

There is one feature about this type of ship that is preserved to this day, long after this plane has been discarded. We used to call them "flying bathtubs." A flight in one of those old HS-2L's was never repeated once the rookie's first request was granted. It was much better to fly one in a bathing suit. Temperamental as a prima donna, they had to be set down just so to avoid a drenching shower bath.

The insignia of the 2nd Squadron has preserved this humorous peculiarity of the HS-2L. It is a design showing Neptune in a bath tub over the sea.

Just before my tour of duty ended, the HS-2L's were being replaced by Loening's.

MANY an argument has waged at Camp-Fire at various times about the cougar or puma—is it a silent animal or not? Here, from W. A. Betikofer, of Washington, D. C., comes a personal experience.

On January 12, 1936, at a few minutes

past noon, an older brother and myself were walking through the National Zoological Park in Washington, when we noticed, among a row of outdoor cages behind the elephant house, two containing pumas. Puma kittens are apparently not desiderata in this zoo; the zoo authorities had separated the lady and gentleman pumas and filled the intervening cages with bears. As we passed the cage containing the female puma, she gazed across the thirty or forty feet toward the male and emitted a short, sharp yowl—much akin to the cry of an amorous house cat but louder, higher-pitched and beginning and ending very suddenly—almost barked out. No response coming from the other cage, the female blinked a couple times and resumed her padding back and forth.

A moment later she suddenly tensed and assumed a crouching pose as if stalking some prey. The cause, one of the half-tame gray squirrels living in the park, approached to take some peanuts thrown at the bear cages which had rebounded from the bars beyond reach; and the puma, with eyes fixed on the squirrel, stalked it around the cage. After a moment the squirrel, with its beady eye on the puma, secured a nut and began to loiter ostentatiously within a couple feet of the wire mesh of the puma's cage, finished the nut and went back for more. This was repeated over two or three minutes, during which time the puma, pacing back and forth in baffled wrath, gave at least a half-dozen peevish yowls much like the first but louder and sharper.

Still later, when nearly a block from these cages, we were startled by another cry which almost certainly could have come only from a puma. It carried that distance through considerable traffic noise, and on a still country night could easily have been heard at a distance of a half-mile or so. While this is no basis for judging the carrying power of a puma's scream when it exerts the full power of its lungs, it is still easy to see that such a cry would carry a long distanec and be a rather terrifying sound to one far from other humans on a dark night.

AS we go to press with this issue, the boatyards on Long Island Sound are filling with hulls and the anchorages begin to look bleak and empty. But a while ago the water was crisscrossed with wakes and there was hardly room to troll a line. At that time a young man fired both barrels of a shotgun and got into the papers.

He had fixed a dinner on his boat for three guests he expected momentarily, and had a table in his cockpit set with dishes, glasses, pitcher, food, when a speedboat came roaring by throwing a wake like a liner. His boat heaved up on the side of that hill and gravity cleared the table. He jumped down into his cabin for a shotgun. He put some birdshot into the back of somebody's neck on the speedboat, and then he saw another one coming in pursuit of the first. He gave that boat the left barrel.

I don't know how the case came out. None of the people who had been shot were hurt much worse than if a flock of hornets had done the job. The young man was arrested—felonious assault, intent to kill, etc.

His action was certainly not justified, but a lot of people knew just how he felt.

That story reminded me of another—how an old seadog handled the same situation and had a different kind of difficulty with the law. No names, for reasons that will be apparent—we'll call him Captain Barnacle. He's not big, but lean and straight, past seventy and looking about fifty-five, talks little, but when he talks his crackling speech shoots off profanity like sparks off a grindstone.

He was in the South Seas fifty years ago — sailor, mate, skipper — pearling, blackbirding, trading—was with Bully Hayes for a time, I've heard. He lives alone on a thirty-foot sloop on Long Island Sound. He sailed that boat to the Galapagos a few years ago, and had a bad time hove to off Hatteras on his return, but suffered no harm from the trip except on the day he dropped anchor in his home port—he went ashore for supplies, was badly injured by an automobile, and spent months in a hospital.

After much toil he sold a story in 1930, and he's tried a few since. This man who talks so bluntly writes, oddly enough, with great strivings for elegance

—he hangs flowers and bunches of grapes on his paragraphs.

Captain Barnacle was in his rowboat painting about the stern of his sloop when a speedboat whizzed close by. The rowboat stood on its head and the paint pot spilled over it. Captain Barnacle grabbed for his sloop and the paint brush went overboard.

He watched the speedboat come to its mooring, then he rowed over to it. The owner and his wife sat in the front seat, and a man and lady guest in the stern. Captain Barnacle brought his old rowboat alongside the shining mahogany and chromium craft and told these people what he thought of them. The owner's wife said that no gentleman would use such language in front of ladies. Captain Barnacle said that if she was the wife of the man driving that boat she couldn't be a lady, she was—. After that no holds were barred. The owner leaned over glaring at this tough old man. Captain Barnacle slapped him on the jaw and knocked him overboard, and rowed back to his sloop.

After the man had gone home and changed his clothes, he swore out a warrant for Captain Barnacle. Then he went back to the yacht club and told the armchair fleet that a barbarian like the captain was a menace that ought to be kept behind bars. The armchair fleet wasn't sympathetic. Gradually this man gathered that it wasn't courtesy to run a speedboat full blast through an anchorage and set everything rolling decks down—it might seem like fun to him but none of the people on the boats liked it. Finally this man telephoned the justice of the peace that he would drop the charges.

Meanwhile a policeman had rowed out to Captain Barnacle and given him a summons to appear before the justice of the peace on Saturday night and answer to assault, profanity, disorderly conduct, etc. Captain Barnacle sat down to write a letter to the justice of the peace. This time his writing wasn't ornamented.

Captain Barnacle has lived very little of his life under the laws of towns and villages. He told the judge the country had too many laws, and it was getting so a man couldn't live here. He said, in effect, that he wouldn't pay any attention to any jackass charge by that jackass, and the judge shouldn't be a jackass about the matter either, and he wasn't coming to court.

The letter arrived the day after the charges had been dropped, but Captain Barnacle didn't know anything about that. The justice of the peace decided the letter was the clearest case of contempt of court he'd ever met. The original charges might have been dropped, but he'd prefer his own—he told the policeman to go and get Captain Barnacle, and they wouldn't wait for Saturday night.

Somebody who liked Captain Barnacle got word to him at once, and the sloop beat the rowboat out of the harbor. Captain Barnacle moved across the Sound to another state.

He came in to see me a few weeks later. I had heard the story from a friend. Captain Barnacle didn't mention the incident, and neither did I. He left a change of address. He explained only that he'd moved his boat from ———, because he'd got——sick of the ———place.

AS announced last month on our twenty-sixth anniversary, we add another folio of sixteen more pages beginning with this issue. This was explained in detail in November—we've had enough growth to give us a margin, and we are ploughing the margin back in the form of more pages.

It gave us much satisfaction this month to send more manuscript to the printers, and we felt the same way when we saw the proof. Likely there'll be another feature or department soon. We are working on one now. H. B

Ask Adventure

Information

vou can't get elsewhere

SPARING the rod, and the cruel bit, doesn't spoil a horse.

Request:—For many years horses have been my hobby and I should be grateful if you would give me your advice on the following:

(a) What is the best treatment for lameness due to sprains.

I'm asking this question because I have seen horses with sprained tendons treated by massage with liniment, or hot fomentations, or cold fomentations, or mud being plastered over the damaged leg and kept wet. (This latter is much favored by Russians and Mongolians.)

(b) Which is the best bit to use on a pony that carries his head low. Mongolian ponies are generally what I should term "heavy headed" and carry their heads low. In other words, they are heavy in front although they are well shaped animals, but short in the neck.

I have noticed from photographs of certain American horses that they are ridden on a bit similar to a "curb" with a single rein, and carry themselves well. Does this bit have a curb chain, and how is the bar shaped? I have often wondered if such a bit would be suitable for a Mongolian pony.

(c) Can glanders be conveyed through hay? If grass over which horses subject to glanders have roamed is made into hay and shipped to another part of the country, will horses fed on such hay contract glanders?

(d) Is there any book published in English describing how horses are taught circus tricks and the High School equitation? I should like to know how horses are taught to rear with a rider, as one often sees on the cinema, to feign lameness, to lie down, to do the Spanish walk.

A friend of mine told me that a former trainer of Ringling's Circus once published a course on this type of training.

—E. F. Turner, Shanghai, China.

Reply by Major R. Ernest Dupuy:—Lameness due to sprains—First—be sure that you see a veterinarian in serious cases. Liniments and hot fomentations are both good. Above all, *massage*. Even dry rubbing with the hand will give results. Ten minutes of massage is worth an hour of soaking, I believe. Be sure to give the horse rest. Keep wet bandages on after rubbing.

b. Bitting for animal carrying the head low—The conformation of your Mongolian or China pony is such that it is almost impossible to make him carry his head high. And, although he might look a bit more flashy if he held his head up, I do not believe in inflicting pain just to produce this result. A severe curb will always make a horse raise his head.

The bit you describe is of a type similar to that used in the United States Army for many years—a plain curb, with high port, called the "Shoemaker" bit. The British did have a similar curb bit but used it in conjunction with a bridoon. Probably they do use it now. It is perfectly possible to use a single curb bit, but it is severe, for only very gentle hands can produce pressure that will not mean pain. Spanish and Moorish bits are of this general type. This sort of bit usually has a port, or bow, and has a curb chain. A tough-mouthed Mongolian pony might go very well on this. When the bow becomes a sharp projection you have the so-called "spade" bit.

c. Glanders—Glanders is transmitted by direct contact of the discharges from an infected animal with the tissues of a sound one; by swallowing the virus when mixed with food, or inhaling it dry and floating in the air. It would be possible, then, to transmit it

(Continued on page 130)

STOP YOUR Rupture Worries!

Special Brooks Appliances are made for all types of reducible rupture and successfully fitted by mail.

The Double Inguinal Appliance is as comfortable to wear as a soft belt yet gives firm support.

A special handmade Cushion is used for Femoral Rupture with equal success.

Learn About My Perfected RUPTURE INVENTION!

WHY worry and suffer any longer? *Learn now about my perfected invention* for all forms of reducible rupture. It has brought ease, comfort and happiness to thousands of men, women and children by assisting Nature to restore the natural strength to the weakened muscles and close the opening. *You can imagine how happy* these thousands of rupture sufferers were when they wrote me to report that they had no further use for any kind of a support. How would YOU like to be able to feel that same happiness—to sit down and write me such a message—a few months from today? Hurry—send coupon quick for Free Rupture Book, self-measuring chart and PROOF of results!

Patented AIR-CUSHION Support Gives Nature a Chance to CLOSE the OPENING

Surprisingly—continually—my perfected Automatic Air Cushion supports the weakened parts allowing Nature, the Great Healer, to swing into action! All the while you should experience the most *heavenly* comfort and security. No obnoxious springs, metal girdles or hard pads. No salves or plasters. My *complete* Appliance weighs but a few ounces, is durable, inconspicuous, sanitary and cheap in price. Wouldn't you like to say "goodbye" to rupture worries and "hello" to NEW freedom . . . NEW glory in living . . . NEW happiness with the help of Mother Nature and my *perfected* Air Cushion Appliance?

PROOF!

Read These Reports on Reducible Rupture Cases.

(In our files at Marshall, Michigan, we have over 31,000 grateful letters which have come to us entirely unsolicited and without any sort of payment.)

"Completely Recovered"

"This is to certify that I have completely recovered from my rupture after wearing your Appliance for one year. It has been two years since I quit wearing your Appliance and I surely feel fine and not bothered with the rupture at all."—Albert J. Cupps, 960 Dodge St., Dubuque, Iowa.

Likes Brooks Best

"I bought one of your Rupture Appliances in 1933, wore it day and night for one year and laid it aside last December. The rupture hasn't bothered me since. I used several others without success until I got a Brooks." J. B. McCarter, Route 2, Box 104, Oregon City, Ore.

"Runs and Plays"

"My son has not worn the Appliance for over a year. He wore one for ten years and I am very grateful now to think he has laid it aside. He is twelve years old, runs and plays hard like all boys and is never bothered about the rupture."—Mrs. M. George, Route 1, Box 103, Cumberland, Md.

SENT ON TRIAL!

My invention is never sold in stores nor by agents. Beware of imitations! You can get it only from my U. S. factories or from my 33 foreign offices. *And I'll send it to you on trial.* If you don't like it—if it doesn't "work"—it costs you NOTHING. But don't buy now. Get the facts about it FIRST! Write me today. I'll answer in plain envelope with interesting information *Free*. Stop Your Rupture Worries—send coupon. All correspondence strictly confidential.

Brooks Appliance Co.
173-H State St.
Marshall, Michigan

CONFIDENTIAL COUPON for RUPTURE SUFFERERS

H. C. BROOKS, President
173-H State St., Marshall, Mich.

Rush me your Free Book, self-fitting chart, proof of results, **all without obligation,** and in plain envelope.

C. E. BROOKS
Inventor

Name ..... State whether for man, ☐ woman ☐ or child ☐

Street .....

City ..... State .....

Train for
ELECTRICITY
IN 12 WEEKS AT COYNE

The Big Coyne Shops in Chicago have a world-wide reputation for training ambitious fellows for their start in this big-pay field in only 12 weeks. Then you get lifetime graduate employment service. By my new plan YOU can take advantage of our wonderful method of learning-by-doing NOW—no need to lose time and money while you strive and save to raise the necessary tuition.

"ARRANGE TO FINANCE YOUR TUITION"

I have a plan where many get training first. Then they have over a year to pay for their training in easy monthly payments starting 5 months from the day they start school. If you will write to me at once I will send you complete details of this sensational new plan, together with the Big Free Illustrated Book telling all about COYNE and how many earn while learning and training you can get there without book study or useless theory. H. C. Lewis

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Dept. 96-76, 500 S. Paulina St., Chicago, Ill.
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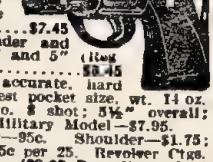
Brand new and tested imported arms

Model 12 POLICE SPECIAL CUT TO $7.45



Swing out cylinder, hand ejector, front latch, 6 shot, double action. Sturdily constructed; fine steel; rubber stocks. 38 cal. 4½" only. Regular price $9.95. Sale price, any caliber.....$7.45
Model 11-Dictator: with swing-out cylinder and push button; 32-32/20 and 38 cals. in 4" and 5" (Reg. $11.) Special.....$8.45
AUTOMATICS: Model 066; blue steel, accurate, hard hitting; durable; single safety. 25 cal., vest pocket size, wt. 14 oz. 4½" overall 7 shot—$5.95; 32 Cal. Auto. 8 shot; 5½" overall; wt. 25 oz. (Reg. $8.45) $6.85. 10 shot Military Model—$7.95.
HOLSTERS: Automatics—75c; Revolver—95c. Shoulder—$1.75; Cartridges: Auto. 25 cal.—65c; 32 cal.—75c per 25. Revolver Ctgs. —32 cal.—$1.00. 32-20—38—$1.50 per 50. ($2.00 Deposit required on C.O.D.'s.) Clip this ad; enclose M. O. Order Today!
Send 3c for N'W Sarmain Catalog; Rifles, S&W, Colts, Binoculars, etc.
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WAKE UP YOUR LIVER BILE—

Without Calomel—And You'll Jump Out of Bed in the Morning Rarin' to Go

The liver should pour out two pounds of liquid bile into your bowels daily. If this bile is not flowing freely, your food doesn't digest. It just decays in the bowels. Gas bloats up your stomach. You get constipated. Your whole system is poisoned and you feel sour, sunk and the world looks punk.

Laxatives are only makeshifts. A mere bowel movement doesn't get at the cause. It takes those good, old Carter's Little Liver Pills to get these two pounds of bile flowing freely and make you feel "up and up." Harmless, gentle, yet amazing in making bile flow freely. Ask for Carter's Little Liver Pills by name. Stubbornly refuse anything else. 25c at all drug stores.

through hay over which glandered animals had roamed. However, this is not a very big possibility, since much time would have passed. Grazing in the same field could well do it.

d. Circus tricks and high school work—I do not know of any book on circus tricks. However, high school equitation is a different matter. Probably the best book is "Horse Training—Outdoor and High School," by E. Beudant, English translation by Col. John A. Barry, U. S. A., which can be obtained through the American Remount Association, 810 18th St.,N. W., Washington, D. C.

The Spanish walk, or piaffer, is one of the steps in high school work. It would be impossible to give you the details without going into the entire subject, since all that sort of work is progressive. It all depends upon the ability of the rider to gather his horse—what the French call the "rassamblir." If you read French, a most marvelous little book is "Methode de Dressage Rapide," by Cdt. J. De Salins, published by Imprimeries Oberthur, Rennes, France. An animal trained conscientiously following this method is then ready for high school work.

As to rearing, the most effective, though cruel, method, and ruinous to the horse in the long run, is to check him with a severe bit while at the same time vigorously spurring him. Unfortunately this is usually the way it is done by the so-called "horsemen" in the cinema.

A horse can be taught to lie down by tripping him with a rope, and throwing him—a complicated process which I do not recommend except in the case of a vicious animal.

I trust that this may be of some assistance to you and wish you luck in training your Mongolian ponies.

A CAMERA fan's problems increase in direct proportion to his interest.

Request:—Could you give me any information on exposure meters? I have a Baldax Speed Camera F.29 lens, with shutter speed up to 1/250 of a second.

Could you advise me concerning tanks for one hundred and twenty roll film?

—James Hamilton, Church Road, Va.

Reply by Mr. Paul L. Anderson:—There are four types of exposure determinant, as follows: (1) Exposure tables, such as those of American Photography, and Burroughs Wellcome & Co. (2) The Wynne and the Watkins type, in which the time required for

(Continued on page 132)

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RADIO MIKE. A handsome black metal mike with long cord. Attached to rad o in a minute, and all set for broad casting thru your radio. Clear, uniform tone without any distortion. Table model that can be held in hand. Similar to shows only constructed of better materials thru out, and guaranteed to work on any set. Only 75 Cents, Postpaid.

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AUTO SCARE BOMB

The Auto Bomb is attached to the starter motor of your car, one wire to the spark plug and the other wire to any part of the motor. The instant your "victim" steps on the starter, there is a shrill whistle, followed by a loud bang. The driver thinks his car has exploded. Attached in a few seconds. Does not harm car. Get more protection than an insurance policy—catches the thief in the act. Price 15c each, 2 for 25c, $1.50 per doz. Shipped by Express. Not Prepaid.

FAMOUS X-RAY

All Ready For Use!

With the wonderful X-ray you can apparently see bones in your fingers, the lead in a pencil, the interior opening on a pipe stem and many other similar illusions. A mystery that very few can satisfactorily explain. Serves the flesh proves transparent! Complete with printed instructions only 10c Post Paid. 600 Page Catalog 10c.

MAGIC FLUTE

New patented musical instrument. Wonderful invention, nothing like it. You can play real music on it and play all the latest popular songs, ragtimes, old time ballads, sacred hymns, dance music; plaintive or lively accompaniment. There is no fingering, and once you have mastered it you can play all kinds of music with facility and ease. Sure to please. Price 10c, 3 for 25c post.

WHOOPEE CUSHION

Whoopee Cushion is made of rubber, inflated like a balloon, and then placed on chair, couch, seat, etc. When the victim unconsciously sits upon the cushion, it gives forth noises that can be better imagined than described. Price 25c.

LOOK! Wonderful Instrument 9 in 1 OPERA GLASS

35c

Nine separate articles in one. Odd, curious and interesting. Lots of pleasure as well as very useful. Double Magnifying Lens for examining the wonders of nature. Opera Glass, Stereoscope, Burning Lens, Reading Glass, Telescope, Prism, and Compass. Pocket Microscope for examining eye, ear, nose and throat. Worth its weight in gold for camping in the open. Folds flat and fits the pocket. Something great—you need one. Don't miss it. Price Postpaid only 35c.

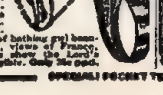
SILENT DEFENDER

Used by police officers, detectives, sheriffs and night watchmen to appear prepared for action. Very effective. Easily fits the hand. Useful in an emergency. Made of aluminum, weight 2 oz. Always ready for use—pocket size. 25c each, 2 for 45c ppd.

STAGE MONEY

With a bunch of these bills, it is easy for a person of limited means to appear prosperous by flashing a roll of these bills at the right time and getting off a genuine bill or two from the outside of the roll. The effect created will be found to be all that can be desired. Prices, assorted, 10 Bills, 20c, 125 for 50c, or $2.50 one thousand assorted.

FRENCH PHOTO RING 25c



A handsome ring, finished in imitation platinum, and set with a large imitation diamond. In the shank of the ring is a small microscopic picture almost invisible to the naked eye, yet magnified to an almost incredible degree. Pictures of bathing girl beauties, French actresses, views of France, Panama Canal, others show the Lord's Prayer, every word legible. Set complete.

Hands Up! Pistol Cigarette Case

25c

It looks like a deadly weapon, but it is merely a novel cigarette case. Better than the real thing in many an exciting moment encountered. Great fun for picking up your friends. They scream and protest. Pull the trigger and the slide flies open, disclosing the cigarettes. Plated 25c and. Catalog 10c

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HOT WATER INSTANTLY! Just plug in the heater and it's all set for a cup of cocoa. Heats clear water in 90 seconds! Costs but a fraction of a cent per hour. Ideal for office, kitchen, doctor, shaving, bath room, barber shop, garage, etc. Complete with 6 feet of heavy duty insulated rubber cord. 110 volts AC or DC current. 2" diameter. ONLY 95c.

ELECTRIC HAIR WAVER 2.00

HAIR WAVE IN 20 MINUTES

At last! Wave your hair at home with this new Electric Hair Waver. Takes only 20 minutes to give any type wave and dry your hair. Safe, gentle heat puts in soft natural, beautiful permanent type curls, waves, ringlets, rolls that last. No more high beauty shop bills. No more tedious, uncomfortable overnight curlers and crimpers. Safer than given you professional wave quickly, easily by electricity. GUARANTEED. Plugs into any light socket. Uses any ordinary current, AC or DC, or home light plant current. Made of fine materials. Complete directions included.

PRICE POSTPAID $2.00

ELECTRITE PENCIL

Electrite Pencil writes in gold silver, red, yellow, purple green blue, etc., on leather, wood, paper bakelite, celluloid, cloth, rubber, etc., etc. Put your name, monogram or initials in gold or silver or other color on your car, wallet portfolios, leather goods, stationery etc. Print and decorate anything you write boys and girls can easily extra cash easily doing this for other people. Every time you point this pencil across a piece of paper it writes in bright metallic color. No ink to spill or wipe. Simplified fountain pen principle. Nothing to get out of order. Always ready for instant use. Refills are inexpensive. Complete set of five electrite pencils in assorted colors. Price $1.00

CCC RING

Here is a splendid ring for every boy or girl. The CCC Ring, just the thing for Uncle Sam have NI ely finished with the American Eagle on side of the shield, silver finish with emblem enameled in red, white and gold. 25c

$1.00 value. Price,

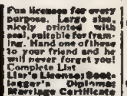
5 Master Keys

Did you ever loose or forget your keys? Probably many times. Don't worry any more about lost keys for our keys, for that matter, as these master keys will open almost any ordinary lock. Five different keys for various types of locks. Will save their cost if you only use them once, but you'll probably find them so handy that you'll always carry them. Five locks are borrow proof. Complete set of five skeleton keys 25c.

DANCING SKELETON 10c

A jointed figure of a skeleton 14 in. in height, will dance to music and perform various grotesque and amusing antics while the operator may be dancing himself. It will lie flat on table, stand up, dance, etc. We send full and complete instructions. Postpaid 10 cents. 3 for 25 cents postpaid.

250 Magic Tricks



An excellent little book containing 250 Parlor Tricks, tricks with cards, coins, handkerchiefs, sleight of hand, shadows, etc. So simple that a child can perform them. Completely illustrated. Entertain and amuse everybody. Only 10c postpaid.

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Fun licenses for every purpose. Large size, nicely printed with seal, suitable for framing. Hand one of these to your friend and he will never forget you! Complete List

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Three new models now out, 25c, 50c and $1.00. Well made and effective. Patterned after latest type of Revolver. Appearance alone will scare a burglar. Takes 22 Cal. Blank Cartridges obtainable everywhere. Great protection against burglars, tramps dogs. Have it lying around without the danger of tached to other revolvers. Fine for 4th of July. Sure to stop work, starting pistol etc. Small size 75c. Large size $1.50. Blank 22-cal. cartridges 35c per 100. Holster (cowboy type) 50c. Shipped by Express only, not prepaid.

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A powerful high power Air Pistol, finished like an Automatic, powerful, sure shot B-B shot obtainable anywhere. Very powerful yet perfectly safe for boys to handle. Two styles: Single Shot Pistol or Repeater The Repeater does 100 shots in one loading. The Single Shot is a Parlor Rifle Gallery and Rifle Range. Shipped by express only. Single Shot Pistol $2.50. 100 Shot Pistol $5.00.

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Here it is, boys! It sounds 12 rifle revolver pops without reloading. Just load the gun with peas, pull the trigger and keep on firing until the barrel is empty. Load and fire again it is positively harmless and safe. They sell like hot cakes, so get one now. Ten times better than the old fashioned blow gun. Shoots far and accurate. Complete with belt for Peamatic only 25c, 600 p catalog 10c.

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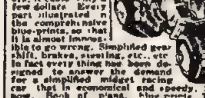

This racer was designed to resemble the demand for a simplified midget racing car. Built from parts found on any boy's junk dealer. It costs only a few dollars. Every part illustrated in the instructions given in blue-prints, so that it is almost impossible to go wrong. Simplified gearshift, brakes, steering, etc., etc. In fact every thing has been designed to answer the demand for a simplified midget racing car that is economical and speedy. Start building now. Book of plans, blue prints, 25c.

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Has Jokes & Riddles, Tricks, Parlor Games, Toasts, Lodge Secrets, 100 Money making Secrets, 22 Recreations, Funny Readings, 11 Parlor Pastimes, 19 Flirtations, 3110 Names & their Meanings, 10 Party Pastimes, 37 Amusing Experiments, Dots and Dash Alphabet, Shadowgraphy, Fortune Teller, Fortunes with Cards, Crystal, Tea Cup, etc. Hypnotism, Ventriloquism, Do-nuts for Checkers, Dots for Checkers, Fox and Geese, 9 Men Morris, Spanish Prison Puzzle, Conversation, 35 Card Tricks, Crystal Gazing and 100 other things for only 15 cents postpaid.

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Very striking, quaint and uncommon. Exclusive design. Embodies Rabbit's foot and swastika emblem of good luck. Solid brass, gold plated. Sent to the buyer. PRICE 25c Postpaid.

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Ask the Magic Rose. There remarkable artificial plants have always been made of a special substance which forecast changes in the weather quite accurately. When a change color according to the state of the weather. If it remains fair: PINK means stormy, and LAVENDER means a change is coming. All you have to do is to keep the plant near a window and it is guaranteed to agree with the weather. Don't let the weather spoil your temper. Learn to predict just what kind of weather it will be! Over 4 inches in height including the pot. Magic Rose, only 15c

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Every normal being is susceptible to love's tender passion. When love comes the depths of the soul are adequate to the language at their command to express the depths of the consuming passion that is sweeping over them. It is to soothe the souls of those who love that this work has been compiled. Read this week and great! Only 10c postpaid.

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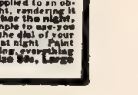

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a piece of sensitive paper to darken to a standard tint is noted, and the exposure calculated from that. (3) The type in which one looks through a small telescope, gradually obliterating the image by interposing a wedge of tinted glass before the eye, and calculates the exposure from markings on the ring which turns the wedge. (4) The type in which the illumination is measured by means of a photo-electric cell and a millivoltmeter.

I do not think it matters a particle which one you use, so far as results are concerned. Any one of them gives good results when used with judgment and after experience has been gained, and none of them is foolproof; you *must* use judgment with any of them. They vary greatly in price, however, from twenty-five cents for some examples of the first type, to $25 or $30 for type four.

For tank development of film, I should prefer an all-metal, stainless steel tank, such as the Nikor, or a similar one.

THE metallic content may be the same —but a mint mark can change a dollar's value.

Request:—Could you give me any information as to how I can best dispose of a gold dollar—date 1854—in perfect condition? I've noticed in advertisements of different numismatic houses that such a coin is valued variously from $200 to $1500. I've written to several of these companies but I haven't received any suitable replies. Which numismatic company is, in your opinion, the most reliable? Which one offers the highest price for a coin such as I described? Some coin shops require coins to be sent to them first, in order to be appraised. Do you think such a procedure would be advisable?

—John H. Chenault, Decatur, Ala.

Reply by Mr. Howland Wood:—There are several gold dollars dated 1854. Those without a mint mark, that is, without a small letter under the wreath on the reverse, are worth $1.50 to $1.60 each. Those with a small D under the wreath are worth $4.00 up according to condition. Those with a small S are worth from $3.00 up to possibly $15.00. Those with a small C under the wreath are extremely rare and would bring several hundred dollars. If you should by any chance have one with a small C under the wreath I would advise you to communicate with Mr. Wayte Raymond, 465 Park Ave., New York City.

(Continued on page 133)

ONE way to fall down and like it! Skis on feet, poles in left hand. *Adventure* for December in right. Then tackle an easy hillside. Get up any way you can.

Request:—I would greatly appreciate the favor if you would tell me how to make both the Telemark turn and the Christiania turn in skiing. In learning to jump, what is the best height of jump to start on?

What is the best wood to get in buying skiis and what kind of finish is best for the bottoms on wet and dry snow? Can you also tell me which form of ski binder is best and where I can get it?

—Ficklin Shenk, Belgrade, Mont.

Reply by Mr. W. H. Price:—You have asked a couple of difficult questions to answer in a letter, but I will do the best I can.

The Telemark is a turn used in heavy snow, but is not of much practical value on a hard, narrow, hush trail. To Telemark to the left, advance the right foot until the turnup of the back ski rests against the ankle of the right or forward foot, and keep it there during the turn. Both knees should be well bent and the heel of the back foot up off the ski. To keep the rear ski flat on the snow, the rear knee must be kept pressing in toward the front leg. This position prevents the skiis from crossing one another. Now to turn, throw your weight forward onto the front ski, edging it slightly and screw it around inward so that it is at a decided angle to the back ski. After you have mastered the turn to the left, learn to make it to the right in the same way, of course, substituting "left" for "right" and "right" for "left" in directions above.

The Christiania should be practiced on a hard surface, either with or without a shallow covering of loose snow. The gradient is not so important, for it is quite as easy to learn this turn on a steepish slope as on a moderate one. To turn to the right, run across the slope at a gentle gradient with the hill on your right, your weight on the left ski, the right ski about a foot in advance. When fairly underway, lean well forward, bend the front knee, shift most of the weight from the left foot to the right heel, and slide the left ski about six inches farther to the rear, turning its point slightly outwards, i.e. downhill, and at the same time flattening it by bending the left knee and ankle well outwards.

You cannot learn even these basic turns by

(Continued on page 134)

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reading a book or even listening to an instructor. Read or listen and then get out and practise. Watch an expert and if possible have him give you some instruction or at least criticize your attempts.

Jumping. Start the run in a normal position until about fifteen yards or so before the edge of the take-off; then bring the feet level, and crouch down quite low. Take care that the knees, as well as the feet, are pressed tightly together, that the weight is well forward, and that the hands hang as low as possible, i.e. with the finger-tips level with the ankles. Unless you pay particular attention to this last point, and try to get as low as you possibly can, it is probable that your position, while feeling to yourself a decided crouch, will only appear to a spectator as a rather half-hearted stoop at the knees and hips.

When this low crouch has become mechanical, you had better hold your arms backwards in a horizontal position, but to touch your ankles first is a good way of making certain that your position is correct. You should leave the take-off with a powerful high jump straight up into the air, followed by a more or less uncontrolled downfall with an almost vertical standing body, hard and forceful landing, outrun.

Skiis are usually made of ash and hickory. Hickory is excellent, but it is said to be a little more brittle than ash, and is also heavier. There are a very large number of good makes and varieties of bindings on the market, but the improved "Gresshoppa" adjustable Ski Harness has proved very satisfactory, and I imagine is carried by most of the sporting goods stores in the United States.

Why not write to the Northland Ski Mfg. Co., 8 Merriam Park, St. Paul, Minn., for their free booklet "HOW TO SKI," and also ask for their catalog. There is also a very good book on skiing entitled "THE ART OF SKI-ING" by Charles N. Proctor in collaboration with Rockwell R. Stephens. This book should certainly be very helpful to the novice and the less expert, because not only does it clearly explain the technique of skiing, but also gives sound advice on equipment, clothing, waxing and ski etiquette. This book is published by Harcourt, Brace & Co., 383 Madison Avenue, New York, at $2.00.

(Continued on page 135)

A PRIMITIVE Malayan tribe with the philosophy of the Stoics.

Request:—Can you give me some general information about the Sakais? I'd like to know something about how they live and what they live on. I'll appreciate anything you can tell me on these people.

—Thomas Dillau, Chicago, Ill.

Reply by Mr. V. B. Windle:—The primitive jungle people called Sakais seclude themselves in the wilds of the Malay Peninsula and are seldom seen by white man or native. They speak their own tongue among themselves but their contact with the outside world is through Malayu, the native dialect of the Malays.

They are diminutive in stature, but have survived both the inroads of civilization and the risks of a hazardous country by an inherited knowledge of jungle lore and a calm courage in the face of danger.

Their requirements in life are simple. "Sufficient unto the day is the food thereof" would appear to be a national slogan. They know the tiger and the panther, the python and the cobra, and against these public enemies they have their poisoned spears and amazingly accurate blow pipes. With these inadequate appearing tools they seek their food and defend their lives.

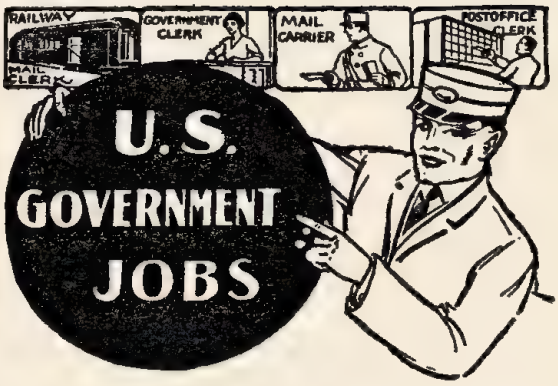
The Sakais build little *attap* huts in the jungle and when the mood dictates they casually abandon their homes and seek new quarters. A home is too permanent a thing for a race that lives day by day in the face of slithering and leaping death.

The extension of rubber estates, the opening of new territory on the mountain sides, and civilization in general, has driven the Sakai deep into jungle country. More deadly to them is the scattering of game caused by the advances of the white man. This has been particularly true of the hawk and the monkey for which the Sakais have a definite desire and which they consider rather tasty morsels.

When game food is scarce the Sakais turn to Serch leaves and betel nut, with a touch of lime to add flavor. Hidden in jungle retreats they grow the leaves for such emergencies and it is probably the only move they make to store up something for tomorrow.

These little men who face the bone-crushing tactics of the python or the hooded

(Continued on page 136)



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death of the cobra as calmly as they chew their betel nut fear and despise the multitudinous insects that torment them night and day. Often when in their huts they will light a fire to keep the insects away and they do not in the least seem to mind the heat and smoke.

Despite their exposed life the Sakais are quite healthy and disease is not one of their problems. Some well meaning people who managed to make contact with some Sakais got them to substitute coat and trousers for the loin cloth. They were amazed to learn that after wearing clothing, disease struck at them with the same suddenness as the crocodiles that sun themselves on the muddy banks of jungle rivers.

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Request:—Will you please tell me where and how one obtains beavers for use in soil conservation work.

A creek runs through our farm, which continually changes its course, and ruins a lot of good farm land. I am of opinion if this were dammed up it would prevent this damage.

—Lee I. Kauffman, Sterling, Ill.

Reply by Mr. Fred L. Bowden:—I am afraid that you'd have quite a lot of trouble in securing beavers for this purpose. In this state, New York, for instance, there are a few (very few) beaver farms, but there are a number of restrictions placed on the operators, one being that they must not ship live beavers out of the state, or if they do, they must have a special permit from the Conservation Department, and this is not always granted.

If the creek were mine I believe I'd dam it myself and save a lot of headaches trying to get beavers to do the work. We'll suppose you get the beavers, unless you fence the tract where you put 'em there is no guarantee they'd stay put. They might, for instance, go over onto the next farm and start doing soil conservation work for your next door neighbor. They are funny that way.

You might write to the Illinois Fish and Game Commission at Springfield, Ill., telling them what you want, and see what they say, but frankly I can think of a lot of easier ways to get a dam across a creek than the one you have in mind. Sorry not to have been of more assistance to you.

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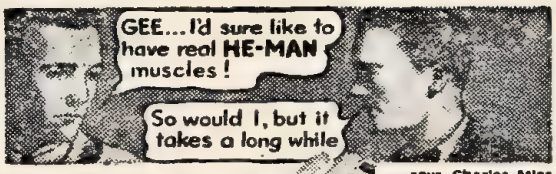

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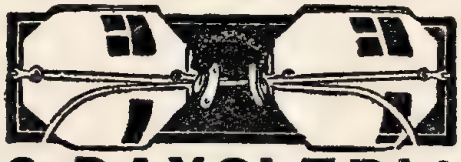

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SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS

Anthropology: *American; north of the Panama Canal; customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism social divisions*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Calif.

Automobiles and Aircraft Engines: *design, operation and maintenance*—EDMUND B. NEIL, care of *Adventure.*

Aviation: *airplanes, airships, airways and landing fields, contests, aero clubs, insurance, laws, licenses, operating data, schools, foreign activities, publications, parachute gliders*—MAJOR FALK HARMEL, 709 Longfellow St., Washington, D. C.

Big Game Hunting: *guides and equipment*—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

Entomology: *insects and spiders; venomous and disease-carrying insects*—DR. S. W. FROST, Arendtsville, Pa.

Ethnology: (*Eskimo*)—VICTOR SHAW, 20th & W. Garfield Sts., Seattle, Wash.

Forestry: *in the United States; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States*—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

Tropical Forestry: *tropical forests and products*—WM. R. BARBOUR, Chapel Hill, N. C.

Fur Farming—FRED L. BOWDEN, 104 Fairview Ave., Binghamton, New York.

Herpetology: *reptiles and amphibians*—CLIFFORD H. POPE, care of *Adventure.*

Marine Architecture: *ship modeling*—CHAS. H. HALL, 446 Ocean Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Mining: *territory anywhere in North America, mining law, prospecting outfitting; any mineral, metallic or nonmetallic*—VICTOR SHAW, care of *Adventure.*

Motor Vehicles: *operation, legislative restrictions and traffic*—EDMUND B. NEIL, care of *Adventure.*

Ornithology: *birds; their habits and distribution*—DAVIS QUINN, 3508 Kings College Pl., Bronx, N. Y.

Photography: *outfitting, work in out-of-the-way places, general information*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, N. J.

Precious and semi-precious stones: *cutting and polishing of gem materials; technical information*—F. J. ESTERLIN, 901-902 Shreve Bldg., 210 Post Road, San Francisco, Calif.

Radio: *telegraphy, telephony, history, receiver construction, portable sets*—DONALD MCNICOL, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J.

Railroads: *in the United States, Mexico and Canada*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill.

Sawmilling—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care of *Adventure.*

Sunken Treasure: *salvaging and diving*—COMDR. EDWARD ELLSBERG, U. S. N. R., care of *Adventure.*

Taxidermy—SETH BULLOCK, care of *Adventure.*

Wildcrafting and Trapping—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

MILITARY, NAVAL AND POLICE SUBJECTS

Army Matters: *United States and Foreign*—CAPT. GLEN R. TOWNSEND, 5511 Cabanne Ave., St. Louis, Mo.

Federal Investigation Activities: *Secret Service, etc.*—FRANCIS H. BENT, 251 Third St, Fair Haven, N. J

Royal Canadian Mounted Police—PATRICK LEE, 7 Brook Lane, Great Neck, Long Is., N. Y.

Police, City and State—FRANCIS H. BENT, 251 Third St., Fair Haven, N. J.

U. S. Marine Corps—CAPT. F. W. HOPKINS, C. C. C. Co. No. 510, Mammoth Cave, Ky.

World War: *strategy, tactics, leaders, armies, participants, historical and political background*—BEDA VON BERCHEM, care of *Adventure.*

GEOGRAPHICAL SUBJECTS

The Sea, Part 1 *British and American waters, ships, oceans, waterways, seas, islands, Atlantic and Indian Oceans, Cape Horn, Magellan Straits, Mediterranean Sea, Islands and Coasts.*—COMDR. EDWARD ELLSBERG, U.S.N.R., care of *Adventure.*

Philippine Islands—BUCK CONNER, Quartzsite, Ariz., care Conner Field.

★New Guinea—L. P. B. ARMIT, Port Moresby, Territory Papua, via Sydney, Australia.

★New Zealand: Cook Island, Samoa—TOM L. MILLS, 27 Bowen St., Feilding, New Zealand.

★Australia and Tasmania—ALAN FOLEY, 18a Sandridge St., Bondi, Sydney, Australia.

★South Sea Islands—WILLIAM MCCREADIE, "Cardross," Suva, Fiji.

Asia, Part 1 ★*Siam, Malay States, Straits Settlements, Java, Sumatra, Dutch East Indies Ceylon*—V. B. WINDLE, *care of Adventure.* **2** *French Indo-China, Hong Kong, Macao, Tibet, Southern, Eastern and Central China*—SEWARD S. CRAMER, care of *Adventure.* **3** *Northern China and Mongolia*—PAUL H. FRANSON, Bldg. No. 3 Veterans Administration Facility, Minneapolis, Minn. **4** *Persia, Arabia*—CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, care of *Adventure.* **5** ★*Palestine*—CAPT. E. W. EADES, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C.

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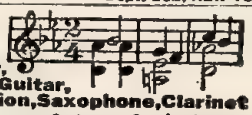
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Fortunately, nature has provided an automatic method of getting rid of these excess Acids. To get rid of these Acids nature provides that your blood circulate 200 times an hour through 9 million tiny, delicate tubes, or filters, in your Kidneys. It is the function of the Kidneys to filter out these health-destroying Acids, and to purify the blood so that it can take energy and vitality to every part of your body. But if your Kidneys slow down and do not function properly, and remove approximately 3 pints of Acids, Poisons, and liquids from your blood every 24 hours, then there is a gradual accumulation of these Acids and Wastes, and slowly but surely your system becomes poisoned making you feel old before your time, run-down, and worn-out.

Causes Many Ills

If poorly functioning Kidneys cause you to suffer from Acidity, Getting Up Nights, Nervousness, Leg Pains, Dizziness, Frequent Headaches, Rheumatic Pains, Swollen Joints, Circles Under Eyes, Backache, Loss of Vitality, or Burning, Itching and Smarting, don't waste time worrying and waiting. The natural thing to do is to help your Kidneys with the doctor's special, guaranteed Kidney diuretic prescription, called Cystex (pronounced Siss-Tex). Cystex works directly on the Kidneys and Bladder, and helps the Kidneys in their function of washing impurities and Acids from the system and in maintaining the purity of the blood. Don't try to overcome Acidity in your blood by taking medicines to offset the Acidity. The only way you can really get rid of the Acidity is by helping your Kidneys to function properly and thus remove the Acid from your system. The Acid is bound to stay there unless the Kidneys function properly.

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SIXTEEN MORE PAGES—15c as before

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The "New Deal" is opening up new jobs, creating unusual opportunities, bringing back prosperity. But that does not insure prosperity for you. Only you can insure that.

For months—maybe years—employers will be able to pick and choose out of the millions now unemployed or dissatisfied with their work and pay. Naturally they will pick the men with most preparation and ability.

You should—you must—make yourself quickly more valuable—to protect what you have and to insure getting your share of the promotions and pay raises. It is being done by OTHERS—it can be done by YOU!

Ask us to send you full details about our new spare time training, and to explain how it prepares you to meet today's demands and opportunities, also about our salary-increasing plan. If you really are in earnest, you should investigate *at once*. Check your field below, write your name and address, and *mail*.

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THREE hundred and sixty-five days from now—what?

Will you still be struggling along in the same old job at the same old salary—worried about the future—never able to make both ends meet?

One year from today will you still be putting off your start toward success—thrilled with ambition one moment and then cold the next—delaying, waiting, fiddling away the precious hours that will never come again?

Don't do it, man—don't do it.

There is no greater tragedy in the world than that of a man who stays in the rut all his life, when with just a little effort he could advance.

Make up your mind today that you're going to train yourself to do some one thing well. Choose the work you like best in the list below, mark an X beside it, and, without cost or obligation, at least get the full story of what the I. C. S. can do for you.

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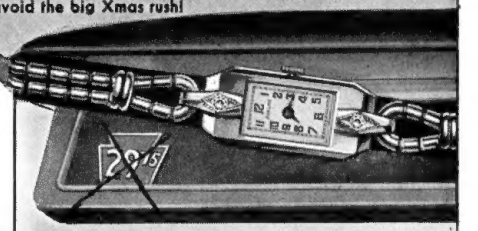

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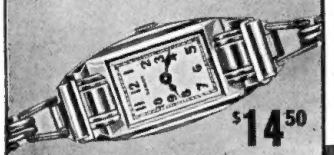

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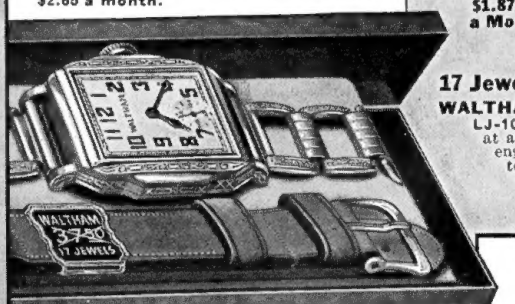

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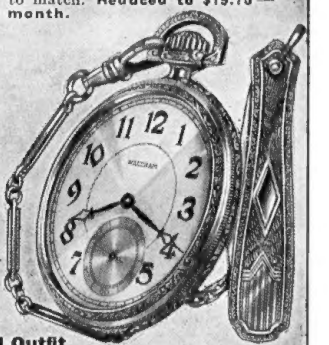

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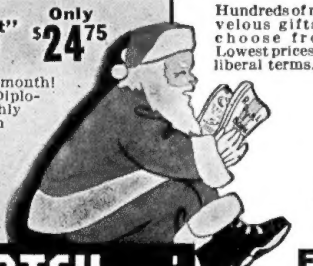

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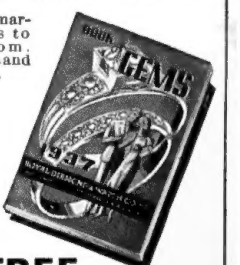

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